IMAGES OF WAR

Hitler's Mountain Troops 1939-1945

The Gebirgsjager

RARE PHOTOGRAPHS FROM WARTIME ARCHIVES

IAN BAXTER

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About The Author

Ian Baxter is a military historian who specialises in German twentieth century military history. He has written more than thirty books including Poland – The Eighteen Day Victory March, Panzers In North Africa, The Ardennes Offensive, The Western Campaign, The 12th SS Panzer-Division Hitlerjugend, The Waffen-SS on the Western Front, The Waffen-SS on the Eastern Front, The Red Army At Stalingrad, Elite German Forces of World War II, Armoured Warfare, German Tanks of War, Blitzkrieg, Panzer-Divisions At War, Hitler's Panzers, German Armoured Vehicles of World War Two, Last Two Years of the Waffen-SS At War, German Soldier Uniforms and Insignia, German Guns of the Third Reich, Defeat to Retreat: The Last Years of the German Army At War 1943 – 1945, Operation Bagration – the destruction of Army Group Centre, German Guns of the Third Reich, Rommel and the Afrika Korps, U-Boat War, and most recently 'The Sixth Army and the Road to Stalingrad'. He has written over one hundred journals including ' Last days of Hitler, Wolf's Lair, Story of the V1 and V2 rocket programme, Secret Aircraft of World War Two, Rommel At Tobruk, Hitler's War With His Generals, Secret British Plans To Assassinate Hitler, SS At Arnhem, Hitlerjugend, Battle Of Caen 1944, Gebirgsjäger At War, Panzer Crews, Hitlerjugend Guerrillas, Last Battles in the East, Battle of Berlin, and many more. He has also reviewed numerous military studies for publication, supplied thousands of photographs and important documents to various publishers and film Production Companies worldwide, and lectures to various schools, colleges and universities throughout the United Kingdom and Southern Ireland.

Photographic Acknowledgements

It is with the greatest pleasure that I use this opportunity on concluding this book to thank those who helped make this volume possible. My expression of gratitude first goes to my German photographic archivist and collector, Sebastian Ramus. He has been an unfailing source; supplying me with a number of very rare *Gebirgsjäger* photographs that were obtained from numerous sources. I also wish to display by debt to Franz Zeigert who researched and contacted numerous collectors all over Germany, trying in vain to find various mountain troop photographs. Unfortunately, some collectors would not part with some of their prized images, which made finding them so much harder. Photographs showing the 'Nord' division, along with later war imagery, was difficult to say the least to find unpublished. I had numerous researchers trying to locate these elusive photographs, but I am thankful, once again, to Sebastian and Franz that managed to find them in various photo collections, mainly in Germany.

Further a field in Poland I am also extremely grateful to Jann Klepacz, my Polish photographic specialist, who supplied me with a number of rare photographs that he obtained from private photographic collections in Poland, Russia and the Ukraine. The images show a host of interesting photographs showing the *Gebirgsjäger* fighting on the Eastern Front including fighting in Poland during the last desperate months of the war.

Finally, I wish to display my kindness and appreciation to my *Gebirgsjäger* collector and photographic specialist, Edward Roberts, from the USA, who supplied me with a number of rare unpublished photographs showing the *Gebirgs* deployed both on the Eastern and Western Fronts.

Training

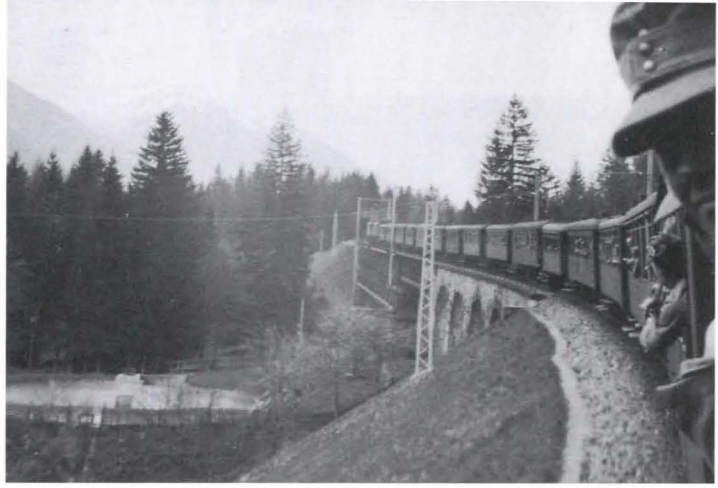
The mountain soldier, or *Gebirgsjäger*, was a relatively new member of the fighting forces, dating back to 1915, when the first of these special forces was formed in Bavaria. By 1935, the nucleus of the first new *Gebirgs* Division was born as Hitler begun his rebuilding of the German Army. Three years later, following *Anschluss* in Austria, more experienced Alpine troops from the Austrian Army joined the *Gebirgsjäger*, which enlarged it two new *Gebirgs* divisions.

Training for the German recruit in the *Gebirgsjäger* was, as with the Army, often tough and methodical. Commanders made no secret of their aim to mentally and physically break the new recruit. Every instructor put great emphasis on aggression and were trained and drilled in every possible way in which to overcome the enemy quickly and efficiently, with the least amount of friendly casualties. Each recruit was indoctrinated to fight for the *Führer*, even if it meant shedding one's own blood on the battlefield. Those trainees successful enough to pass were rewarded with the passing-out parade, where each recruit had to swear an oath, before being ordained as a soldier of the *Gebirgsjäger*.

The *Gebirgsjäger* were a light infantry of well-trained soldiers. Each individual had to carry considerable personal kit in his rucksack, but he was also expected to scale mountains as well. The support elements that were available to traditional infantry divisions, such as armoured vehicles, tanks and artillery, were not supposed to be used by the *Gebirgsjäger*. Instead, they were supplied with weapons and other equipment that could be taken apart and carried by pack animals. Each soldier had to learn survival techniques for living in the mountains. He was trained to build a primitive shield of rocks around him, which could protect him against the cold and enemy fire. The mountain soldiers became self sufficient and absolutely adapted to mountain warfare. In their eyes, to go to war meant to fight in their natural element where they enjoyed absolute dominance.

A group of mountain troops pose for the camera at a kilometre post, probably in Austria, in the summer of 1939. Since *Anschluss* in Austria, a large influx of troops had joined the *Gebirgsjäger* where it had enlarged to two new divisions.

Gebirgstruppen are seen onboard a train being transported from their home station eastwards during the summer of 1939. They can be seen holding bottles of beer. The white painted slogan written across the passenger car reads 'You will see us again at home 'Heil Jäger!' '. Such slogans as this were common in the *Gebirgsjäger* to demonstrate their morale.

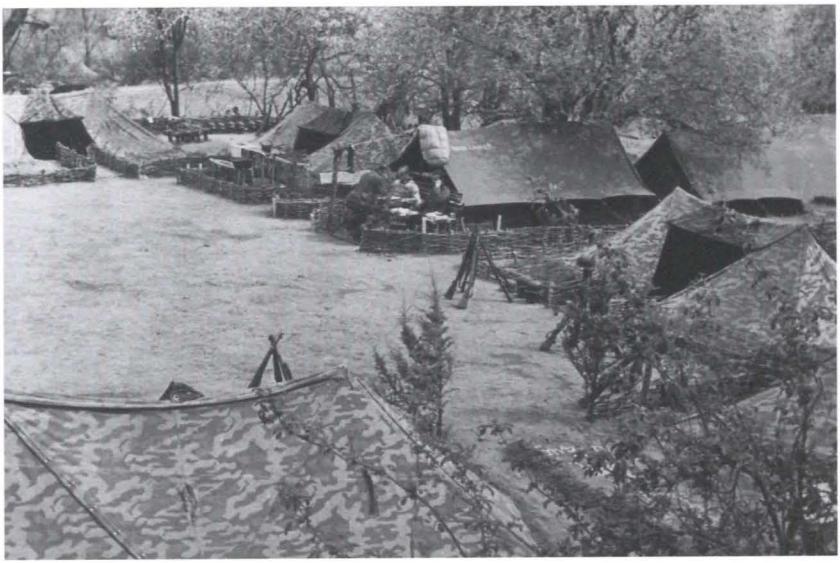


Another photograph of the mountain troops onboard the same train being transported eastwards, probably to join the build-up of forces preparing to attack Poland during the summer of 1939. The German Army had entrusted the XVIII *Gebirgs-Korps* in the high mountains which formed the border between Poland and Slovakia.

A *Gebirgsjäger* company stands in formation, somewhere in Bavari,a during the summer of 1939. The troops wear the typical standard service uniform of that associated with the mountain soldier. They wear the M36 uniform and special field grey heavyweight trousers of a full design to allow other clothing to be worn under them. They wear the mountain field cap or *Bergmütze*. On the right sleeve is the famous embroidered *Gebirgstruppen* badge displaying the Edelweiss. They wear the mountain boots with short puttees which can be seen bound around the ankles to keep foreign matter out. The majority of them carry their M35 steel helmet with its chin strap hung over the cartridge pouches. For their main armament they carry the Mauser 7.9mm Kar98k carbine, the standard issue *Wehrmacht's* shoulder weapon.

Two mountain troopers pause during training activities in an Austrian town, probably in the summer of 1939. The road signs point to two different Austrian towns. In the extensive alpine regions of Austria these troops would have trained in all sorts of conditions in order to allow each soldier to become self sufficient where they would be absolutely adapted for mountain warfare.

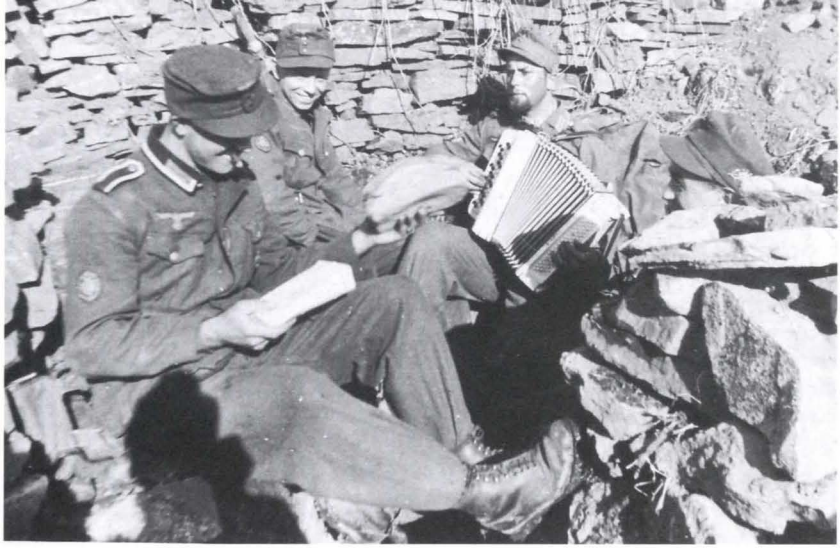
Gebirgsjager troops take what was known as a 'firebreak' beside an alpine road during training in Austria in the summer of 1939. On their right sleeve, the embroidered *Gebirgstruppen* badge can be seen displaying the Edelweiss. Note their mountain boots bearing thick soles and heavy hobnails which were specially designed for mountain climbing.



Two photographs showing unidentified *Gebirgs* units in an encampment in hilly terrain. The soldiers have used a number of shelter quarters for housing a number of troops. These field tents were of standard design and had a fly tarp erected over it to provide insulation from the sun in order to reduce intensive heat inside the tent. These shelter quarter encampments could be quickly erected by the troops, and were an important part in a soldiers training. Without adequate shelter in the mountain regions, a soldier would easily become exposed to freezing temperatures, and as a consequence, could die.

Mountain troops protect themselves from the low temperatures in a mountain region. During training, the *Gebirgstruppen* had to learn a variety of survival techniques for living in the mountains. These soldiers sleep in a shelter quarter on the ground, probably during the spring or summer season where high exposure to the cold was minimal.

Two mountain troopers with a young mule during training. The mule would be the *Gebirgs* main source of transporting equipment to the front, across rugged and mountainous terrain. These hardy pack animals were well suited for rough terrain and were used extensively by the mountain soldiers throughout the war.



Mountain soldiers can be seen in a relaxed setting, probably during a pause in operations. An accordion is being played whilst the soldiers smile and enjoy the moment before resuming their march.

Soldiers erect quarters in the rear area. Wooden quarters such as these were common in the *Gebirgsjäger* and many would be erected on the Ostfront in Army Group North where the front lines were often stagnated for many weeks or even months.

Inside one of the mountain troop log-cabins, soldiers enjoy their rations. Inside these quarters, the *Gebirgs* often had plenty of provisions in order to sustain them on the battlefield. During arctic weather, the troops were well insulated from the terrors of the winter, especially on the Ostfront.

Chapter One

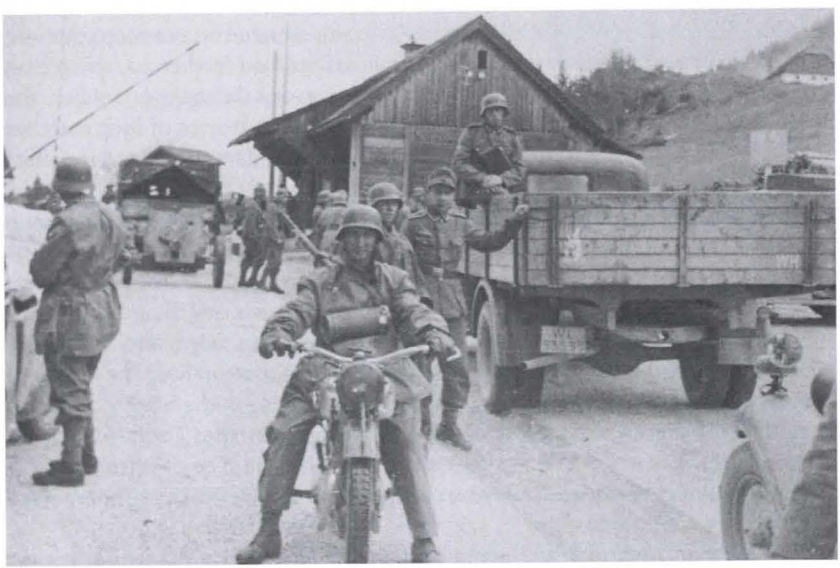
Baptism of Fire (Poland & Norway)

The authorised strength of a typical mountain division against Poland, in September 1939 included about 14,000 soldiers, some 5,500 to 6,000 animals, including approximately 1,500 horses, 4,300 pack animals and 550 mountain horses. A normal division also consisted of some 1,400 vehicles, which included many motorcycles and cross country cars as well as 600 horse-drawn vehicles. It was armed with 13,000 rifles, 2,200 pistols, 500 machine-guns, 416 light machine guns, 66 light mortars, 75 anti-tank rifles, 80 heavy machine guns, 44 medium mortars, 16 light infantry guns, four heavy infantry guns, 12 light anti-aircraft, 39 anti-aircraft cannon, 12 light field or mountain howitzers and 24 light mountain guns. With these weapons the mountain troops enjoyed almost complete supremacy over their Polish enemy.

For the Polish campaign, the German Army entrusted the XVIII *Gebirgs-Korps* to cross the high mountain which formed the border between Poland and Slovakia. The location of the XVIII *Gebirgs-Korps* was situated on the deep southern flank of *14.Armee*, and it meant that mountain troops had further to march than any other formations of the German Army. For every *Gebirgsjäger* soldier, the Polish campaign would be vividly remembered by many stories of long marches from dawn to dusk, repeated day after day with fierce and frequent battles against determined Polish resistance. In some sectors, especially those covered by the *2.Gebirgs-Division*, their advance was particularly exhausting with difficult terrain to cover. The roads were little more than dirt tracks and many of the *Gebirgs* soldiers were compelled to march ankle-deep in sandy dust. Although the first day of the invasion consisted, more or less, of continuous marching, with hardly any respite, over the next two days of the Polish campaign, the 1.Gebirgs, 2,Gebirgs, and 3.Gebirgs-Divisions underwent their baptism of fire. The divisional commander of the 1.Gebirgs-Division called the storming of the heavily defended city of Lemberg an operation of 'great daring'. On the Zboiska Heights surrounding the town, the *Gebirgsjäger* clung to the hillside. They withstood heavy artillery fire until the city eventually surrendered and 25,000 Polish prisoners were captured.

The German invasion of Poland was swift. It was the first operational

Two photographs showing a *Gebirgstruppen* unit crossing the Polish border during the morning of 1 September 1939. There are a variety of vehicles, including support trucks and motorcycle combinations, along with vehicles towing the 3.7cm PaK35/36 anti-tank gun. Note the returning pack animals moving rearward to collect more supplies.



demonstration of Blitzkrieg tactics, combining the ruthless use of armour, mobile infantry and air support. The brave Polish Army was overwhelmed by this awesome display of military power as well as being taken by surprise. Although the *Gebirgsjäger* did not play a decisive part in the campaign, it contributed to the successful conclusion with distinction.

By early 1940, the 2. and 3.Gebirgs-Divisions were poised to do battle on the Western Front. But, in March, the 3. *Gebirgsjäger*–Division were withdrawn to Germany to prepare for an attack against Norway. Planning for the invasion of Norway also included an attack upon Denmark. The reason why the Germans needed to occupy Denmark was purely for her northernmost airfields and her harbours, which were needed as bases by the German forces.

For the attack against Denmark, planners drew up a list of strategic objectives that were all to be taken within an hour by airborne assaults, behind which would come conventional forces to occupy the country. The attack upon Norway would be undertaken by both sea and airborne attack, but it was agreed that all principal objectives would take longer to complete, but only a matter of hours.

Operation Weser-Exercise, which was the code-name for the attack, was planned to be launched on 9 April 1940. No real opposition was anticipated from either Denmark or Norway and it was reckoned that the invasion would be completed within a matter of a few days.

The mountain troop's objective was the port of Narvik in the north of Norway. The *Gebirgsjäger* division was given the task of capturing Narvik under the command of Oberst Windlisch. The landing was unopposed and the town was taken without a shot. The divisional commander, *Generalleutnant* Eduard Dietl, demanded, and received the same day, a formal surrender of the local garrison. The success of the *Gebirgsjäger* was short-lived when the Royal Navy arrived the following day and unleashed a series of heavy naval attacks that saw the sinking of a German flotilla with heavy losses.

Totally cut-off, Dietl and his mountain troops, together with 2,000 now redundant sailors pressed into service, were ordered to construct a defensive ring around most of the port. Over the following days, the *Gebirgsjäger,* once again, showed their special skills against Norwegian regular army units and elements of a British expeditionary force and Polish and French troops supported by heavy Royal Navy bombardments. The battle raged day and night with the mountain troops fending off each assault. But, as the fighting continued to rage, the attrition rate weakened the German defences. Time was slowly running out for Dietl's beleaguered force in Narvik. He decided to make one last attempt to reach the port by sending a company from each *Gebirgsjäger* battalion. Carrying only light equipment, they endeavoured to reach the port at speed. The journey took them over 130-miles of barren wilderness, crossing rivers and glaciers in appalling arctic

Three photographs showing the *Gebirgsjäger* on the march at the beginning of the war. For these soldiers advancing from the Slovak border into Poland, the terrain offered a wide range of challenges to any units attempting to operate in it. The ground was often irregular, broken or rugged making traversing difficult. The long marche through Poland frequently had its own physical challenges on both the men and their animals. In many areas of the advance, road and rail were almost non-existent, making the advance often slow and precarious.

conditions. When reports finally confirmed that a relief force, consisting of remaining elements of the 3.Gebirgs-Division, were only a few days march from Narvik, an order arrived cancelling the operation. On 8 June, a *Gebirgs* patrol unit finally confirmed that the Allies had reluctantly evacuated their troops from Narvik. The following day Norway surrendered.

The *Gebirgsjäger* were hailed heroes of Norway and Dietle, who was decorated with the Knights Cross of the Iron Cross in recognition of his men's success, was soon known in Germany as 'The Hero of Narvik'. As in the Polish campaign, the mountain troops had once again shown their ability to resist at all costs. But it was in Norway for the first time that the troops had shown their expertise in the snow. Energetic commanders with great Alpine qualifications had led their men across a wilderness in which there were no roads at all. In some areas they advanced through snow more than a metre deep, whist in other places the area was barren rock.

Posing near a destroyed mountain building on the Slovak/Polish border, a 3.7cm PaK35/36 anti-tank gun can be seen. The gunners are seen wear the shelter quarter or *Zeltbahn*.

Gebirgs troops preparing to move out from a Slovak village square in order to prepare for the long march through Poland alongside the German 14.*Armee*. A typical Gebirgs-Division, in 1939, comprised of 17,000 men and about 900 motor vehicles, 450 motorcycles, 1,110 horse drawn wagons, and 5,300 horses and mules.

Two mountain soldier NCOs advance through a mountainous pine forest during the initial stages of 'Case White', the German code-name for the invasion of Poland, in September 1939. Both soldiers wear the standard issue Greatcoat with dark green collar.

After traversing through the mountain ranges along the Slovak and Polish border, extensive areas of southern Poland were often flat with streams, ravines and rivers making effective natural obstacles for the mountain troopers. In this photograph, a column of *Gebirgs* soldiers cross a stream with Mules towing If.8 Infantry carts. In the far distance, at the foot of the mountain, a long column of mountain troops can be seen. Note the white Edelweiss insignia painted on the infantry cart indicating that this belongs to the 1.Gebirgs-Division.

Gebirgs engineers have set to work preparing ground, probably for a bridging section across a river. Many of the bridges in southern Poland were destroyed by Polish demolition teams which often hindered German movement.

A *Gebirgs* pioneer unit are seen erecting a bridge equipment 'C' across a river. Much of the wood obtained to construct these bridges were commandeered from lumber stocks and followed the advancing column into Poland.

Two *Gebirgsjäger* medical stretcher bearers are seen moving an injured comrade to one of the hastily erected field hospitals in the rear. An officer overlooks the procedure, possibly wearing the *Gebirgs* wind jacket.

One of the most important aspects of military synchronization was effective communication. Here, in this photograph, a signalman engineer is seen fixing a telephone line so that the various commands could communicate between themselves.

Two photographs taken in sequence showing local civilian carts pressed into service and being used by *Gebirgstruppen* of the 1.Gebirgs-Division, in September 1939. Local civilians were often hired to drive the wagons and were paid very well for their services. However, it was frequently a dangerous preoccupation with a number of them being killed by enemy fire.

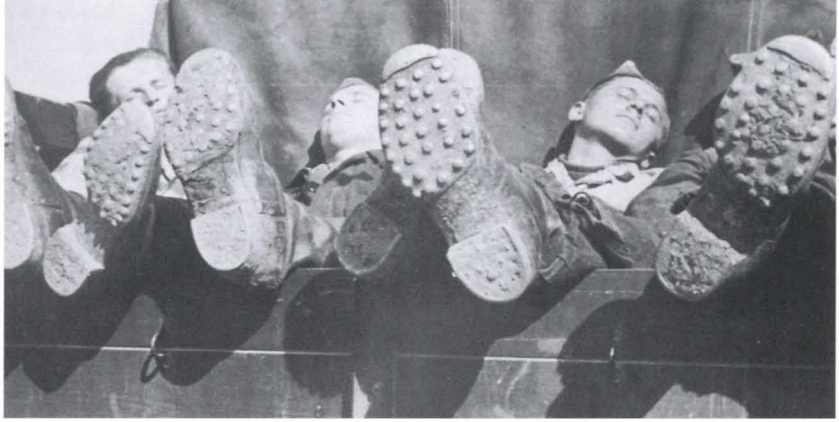
Mountain troops are seen paddling across a river in a pneumatic boat. These 18 feet boats could carry a multitude of equipments up to 1.35tons. They were also used to construct pontoon bridges. In this photograph, bicycles can be seen stacked onboard.

Two motorcyclists, wearing their distinctive rubberised coats, wade across a stream during a *Gebirgs* units drive through southern Poland. A pioneer with a spade has been attempting to erect a temporary crossing for the motorcycles, but without much luck.

Mountain troops have occupied a village somewhere in southern Poland and are seen cleaning their weapons. This was known to the soldiers as, 'Clean and patch hour', which was a period of time allowed in order to clean weapons and repair clothes before resuming operations.

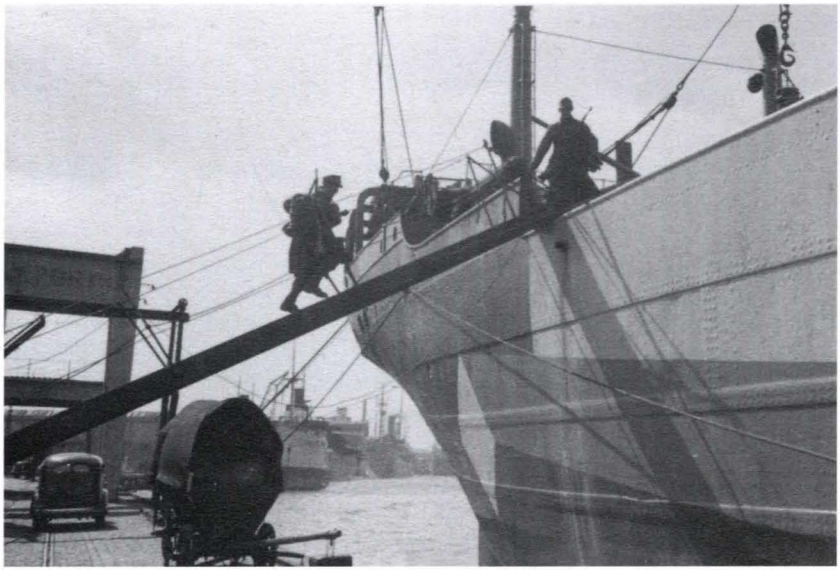
The arduous terrain in which the mountain troops advanced into Poland can well be imagined and, as a consequence, sapped the strength from many of the men participating in the long march. In this photograph, a pack-mule unit takes a much needed respite.

Two photographs taken of the same bridge, destroyed by a Polish demolition team, during the German drive through Poland, in September 1939. In one of the photographs, two *Gebirgs* soldiers can be seen carrying supply bundles on a pole.



Gebirgstruppen sleep on the rear of a supply truck during operations in Poland. Note the detail of the soles of the climbing boots. These boots were known as the *Bergstiefel* or mountain boots, which were harder wearing than the standard issue, black leather marching boots, issued to the *Landseer*.

Mountain troops have unloaded their supplies and prepare to move along the coast. It was in the early morning of 9 April 1940, 'Weser Day', when the German Army finally unleashed its might against Denmark and Norway. The invasion fleet's nominal landing time – Weser Hour (Weserzeit) – was set to 05:15 AM German time, equivalent to 04:15 Norwegian time. The first German forces ashore in Norway landed by ferry in Gedser at 04:15, and moved quickly north. Progress was swift with minimal resistance.



Two photographs showing a German vessel in early April 1940, preparing for its voyage to Norway, carrying *Gebirgsjäger* troops and supplies. The mountain troops objective was the port of Narvik. The planned attack again Denmark and Norway was code-named 'Operation Weser-Exercise' was to be launched on 9 April 1940. No real opposition was anticipated from either Denmark or Norway and it was reckoned that the invasion would be completed within a matter of a few days. In order to meet the deadline for the attack, a number of slow moving tanker and supply ships left German ports in advance, so that they could be in position to refuel the vessels of the task force as they arrived to carry out their attack, code-named 'Weser Day' (Wesertag).

Two photographs showing mountain troops of the 3.Gebirgs-Division preparing to leave port in one of the supply ships destined for Norway in early April 1940. These Gebirgstruppen were under the command of General Eduard Dietl and their objective was to capture Narvik and Trondheim using the 136.137.138. and 139.Gebirgs-Light-Infantry, the 111.Gebirgs-Artillery and the 112.Gebirgs-Infantry. For the attack, five attack groups were formed for the invasion. *Grupe.1*, headed by the battle cruisers 'Gneisenau' and the 'Scharnhorst' was to attack Narvik, *Gruppe.2*, supported by the 'Hipper' was to attack Trondheim, *Gruppe.3* was to attack Bergen, *Gruppe.4* was to attack Kristiansand, and *Gruppe.5* was to attack Oslo. *Gruppe.1* and 2 were also accompanied by a total of fourteen destroyers. The ships carrying German troops started to leave German ports on 7 April.

Two photographs showing Gebirgstruppen of the 3.Gebirgs-Division on the march through Norway during the initial phase of the campaign. With much of the terrain mountainous, moving vehicles was sometimes slow due to the unfavourable pine roads along the coast. Although the Norwegian Army were taken by complete surprise by the German invasion, unlike most of the Danish the Norwegian military were determined in a number of areas to oppose the German advance.

A coloumn of horsedrawn supply carts march along a road. Among the carts is a HF 12 small kitchen wagon. These small mobile kitchens could operate on the move, cooking stews, soups, and coffee. The limber carried utensils and equipment. The troops nicknamed these kitchen wagons as 'goulash cannon's'. Many of these mobile kitchens were often towed by animal draught.

A Gebirgs staff car has halted on an alpine road somewhere near Narvik. Officers are seen conversing as they walk along the road. As German forces pushed forward, the remaining Norwegian Army gathered as best they could to oppose the German advance up the coast towards the central cities of Andalsnes, Trondheim and Namos, and to counter the German landing in the far north at Narvik. The Gebirgs fought with considerable skill and tenacity.

Gebirgstruppen pause in their advance and rest beside a road with their support vehicles during operations just outside Narkvik. The success of the *Gebirgsjäger* was short lived in Narvik. *Generalleutnant* Eduard Dietl and his mountain troops, together with 2,000 redundant sailors were pressed into service and ordered to construct a defensive ring around most of the port of Narvik.

Gebirgsjäger troops along a coastal road somewhere in eastern Norway. The soldier's distinctive *Bergmütze* mountain field cap can be identified along with the standard M36 field blouse with its dark facing collar.

During a short rest break, Gebirgsjäger troops are seen resting on a hillside overlooking a small coastal village. In Norway, the mountain environment offered a wide range of challenges for the men. The ground was often irregular, broken and rugged but many had extensive training on this sort of terrain.

A column of Gebirgs vehicles laden with supplies and troops have halted on an alpine road. One of the vehicles can be seen towing a 3.7cm PaK35/36 anti-tank gun. Whilst this PaK gun was now regarded as outmoded, against the Norwegian Army it still undertook sterling service.

A *Gebirgsjäger* unit rest on a slope of a hill. The soldier's uniforms blend well with the surrounding vegetation and local terrain. The terrain in which these troops fought was often very hazardous. Although their equipment was much the same as for other infantrymen, there were differences. The mountain troopers were provided with larger water bottles and special high-capacity rucksacks. They had heavy, sturdy climbing boots and puttees, wind jackets, snow camouflage suits, and other cold weather clothing. Specially trained troops also received ice axes, hard-lay climbing rope, pitons and piton hammers, carabiners, and avalanche marker cords and searching flags.

A mountain trooper stands on a hillside surveying the devastation wrought by a heavy enemy contact. Dead horses and soldiers can be seen lying in the vegetation. This *Gebirgstruppen* wears a Veterinary personnel badge on his right arm.

Mountain troops on a hillside have set-up camp utilizing their shelter quarters to protect themselves against the harsh weather. The troops all wear the distinctive *Bergmütze* field cap worn by all ranks of mountain units, ski units and Jager personnel. It was worn in preference to almost all other forms of head-dress permitted to be worn by these troops, almost as a form of pride.

Gebirgsjäger soldiers rest on a mountain top overlooking one of the many Norwegian fjords. These men are more than likely mountain reconnaissance troops. This patrol can obviously see a great distance before them, but, in general, climbing the mountains often severely limited observation.

A mountain pioneer section has put together part of a bridge section and floated it across a river with the aid of barges. A staff vehicle and a Horch cross country car can be seen being transported across the river. A mountain pioneer battalion had two companies and a battalion train made up of munitions and medical materials section, mines and destruction section, a river crossing materials section, a workshop section and a motor air-compressor.

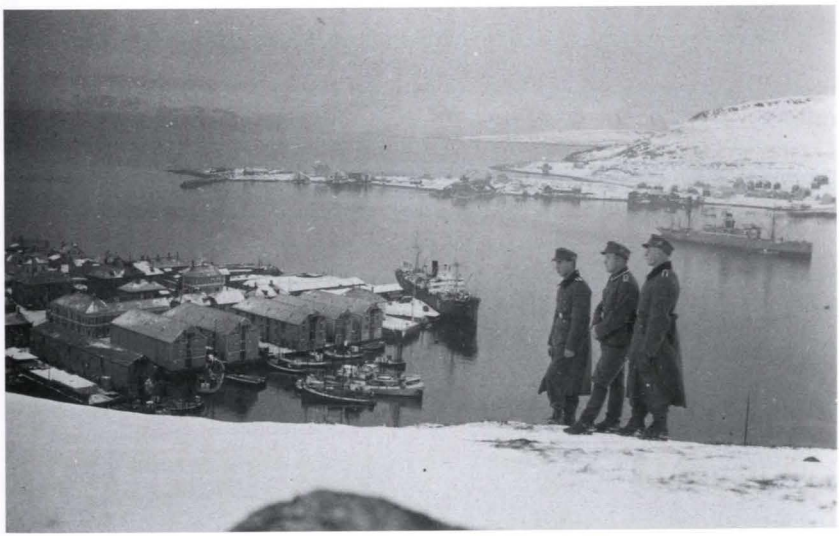
Gebergstruppen onboard a wooden raft, in one of the Norwegian Fjords, laden with supplies, personal equipment, bicycles and an MG34. The machine gun is seen mounted on a tripod in an anti-aircraft role in order to defend its position against low flying enemy aircraft. The MG34 was a very effective weapon and on its sustained mount in an AA role it was more than capable of warding off low flying aircraft.

A Gebirgsjäger motorcyclist can be seen standing next to his motorcycle and an Hf 12 small field kitchen wagon. Beneath the tarpaulin are probably the kitchen utensils and stocks of food. Note the white national emblem painted on the tarpaulin for aerial recognition.

Two Gebirgsjäger troops, one with an accordion and the other a guitar, play music for their comrades whilst they rest in a Norwegian village. The mountain troopers' main objective in Norway was the port of Narvik. The Gebirgsjäger division was given the task of capturing the Narvik, under the command of Oberst Windisch. The landing was unopposed and the town was taken with a shot.

As with many roads in mountainous areas the condition of them varied considerably from solid well built structures to muddy tracks. Rain was a constant problem in Norway and it often turned some of the ruttiest of roads into a quagmire. Here, in this photograph, Gebirgs pioneers have been set to work ensuring that a dirt road is adequate for heavy traffic.

Three *Gebirgs* soldiers overlook a small fishing port, somewhere along the Norwegian coastline, during the occupation of the country in late 1940. Strategically and economically, the occupation of Norway was of great importance to the German military war machine. Not only could it now continue to transport vital supplies from the ports such as iron ore, but it could use the airfields to send long-range aircraft to bomb Britain. German commerce raiders too used Norway as a staging base to reach the North Atlantic with impunity. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, air bases in Norway were also used to raid Allied arctic convoys there, inflicting massive losses on shipping.



Chapter Two

Attacking France & Yugoslavia (1940 - 1941)

For the attack against France and the Low Countries, the German Army were divided into three army groups – Army Group A, B and C. The main strike would be given to Army Group A, which would drive its armoured units through the Ardennes, and then swing round across the plains of northern France and then make straight for the Channel coast, thereby cutting the Allied force in half and breaking the main enemy concentration in Belgium, between Army Group A advancing from the south and Army Group B in the north. The task of Army Group B was to occupy Holland with motorized forces and to prevent the linking up of the Dutch army with the Anglo-Belgian force. It was to destroy the Belgian frontier defences by a rapid and powerful attack and throw the enemy back over the line between Antwerp and Namur. The fortress of Antwerp was to be surrounded from the north and east and the fortress of Liege from the north-east and north of the Meuse.

Army Group C, which was the most southern most of the three army groups, was to engage the garrison of the Maginot Line, penetrating it if possible.

Distributed between the three army groups, the Germans deployed twenty-nine divisions under Army Group B in the north and forty-four division, including the bulk of the armour, under Army Group A in the centre. Army Group C with seventeen divisions covered the southern flank and threatened the French position on its eastern flank.

Only two mountain units, the 1.Gebirgs-Division and the newly created 6.Gebirgs-Division saw action on the Western Front. The 1.Gebirgs-Division started the campaign with the 6.Gebirgs-Division taking part during the final operations. Almost as soon as the mountain troops crossed the frontier, they saw evidence of just how badly the French had been hit by the German armoured spearheads. At the line of the Oisne-Aisne Canal, the Gebirgs-Division protected the flank of the Panzer divisions as they drove towards Amiens.

The French, together with colonial forces, confronted the mountain troops and a fierce and bloody battle ensued. The enemy was determined to hold the canal at all costs and the Gebirgs-Division found themselves under heavy bombardment. Yet again, the troops conducted an aggressive defence until they received orders

A rifle platoon runs through a village during operations in France, in May 1940. Only two mountain units, the 1.Gebirgs-Division and the newly created 6.Gebirgs-Division saw action on the Western Front. The 1.Gebirgs-Division started the campaign with the 6.Gebirgs-Division taking part during the final operations.

Gebirgsjäger troops pause in their march. This is more than likely a company command group, what the Germans called the '*Kompanie-Trupp*' (Company Troop). Note the NCO, seen with an unfolded map, probably conferring with his troop the course of the units advance.

to cross and take the position. Although their contribution was small in France, they still managed to influence some battles by staving off defeat against heavy enemy armour. Such was their stubborn nature that, even when some units were cut off, many mountain troopers continued to fight until they had either secured the area or been killed.

By 5 June, the Gebirgsjäger were fast thundering into the flanks of advancing French armour, and the following day they challenged the tanks with their anti-tank guns. With their PaK 3.7cm 35/36 anti-tank guns, the mountain troops held and managed to know out all enemy fighting vehicles. The threat had finally been driven off. Fresh orders re-directed the division's advance to the Aisne and subsequent orders sent it across the river.

After crossing the river, they were suddenly pulled out of the line and rushed by truck to Lyon. Here, the Gebirgs-Division was given the objective of striking the rear of the French troops defending the Alps against the Italians. Once again, the mountain troops were posed to use their alpine techniques. But the move was immediately halted and the operation cancelled as the Franco-German armistice came into effect on 25 June 1940. Instead, the division was given the duty of guarding the frontier and carrying out the tasks of an army operation.

Following the defeat of France, the *Gebirgsjäger* eventually returned to their home stations where their force was expanded and bolstered by additional troops and equipment. Within ten months, the German Army were once more embroiled in battle, but this time in the Balkans. Among the divisions committed to operations in the Balkans were four mountain units. The 1.Gebirgs-Division took part in the attack on Yugoslavia and launched an attack from Austria. The 4.Gebirgs-Division attacked from Bulgaria, whilst the 5 and 6.Gebirgs-Division launched a series of deep probing assaults into Greece. Attached to the 18.Gebirgs-Korps, their prime objective was to smash the Greek defensive system known as the Metaxas Line.

On 5 April 1941, both the 5 and 6.Gebirgs-Division marched to their attack positions in the high mountains between Bulgaria and Greece. At times, the steep mountain slopes and appalling snow blizzards tested the ability of the Gebirgsjäger.

The Greek defences posed considerable problems for the mountain troops. Many of their positions were well armed and the soldiers that manned them were determined to prevent the Germans from crossing. Despite a series of heavy bombardments by the Luftwaffe, the Greek strong points held in many places, and the Germans were compelled to take out each emplacement one by one. The opening attacks began well in most places. Along the whole divisional sector, mountain troops were moving into action against a high concentration of enemy fire. Hidden under a freezing blanket of snow, the Greek positions caused a number of casualties among the mountain troops. To make matters worse, the

A group of NCOs are seen listing to radio broadcasts during the invasion of France. Although it was illegal to listen to foreign radio broadcasts, troops often ignored this in their quest for the latest news on the front lines, and obviously to listen to light entertainment.

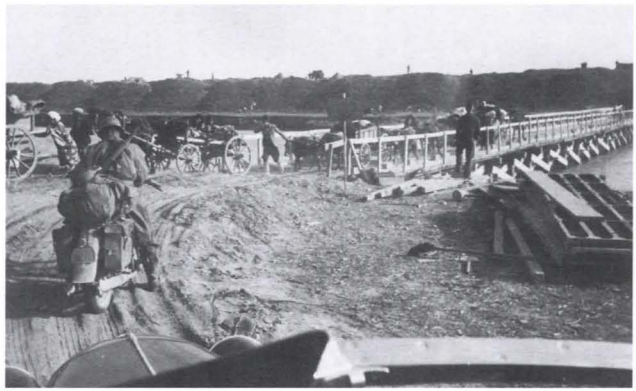
A rifle group cross a stream. The group leader, or *Gruppenführer,* was known as an *Oberjäger*. He can be seen leading his men forward holding a black leather report/map case.

mixture of rain and snow cut down visibility. The cold, coupled with exhaustion, was beginning to affect some of the soldiers. The approach to the enemy emplacements was devoid of cover and littered with barbed wire barricades that protected the extensive trench system. Under a merciless hail of shelling, the Gebirgsjäger crawled forward, pressing themselves to the ground. Occasionally, Greek soldiers would counter-attack, storming out of their trenches in furious bayonet charges. Slowly, the weary mountain troopers began taking one pillbox after another. But still the battle continued in the freezing sleet and snow. Even when the enemy positions were finally captured, the Greeks often moved to the surrounding slopes to mount determined counter-attacks. It took the 5.Gebirgs-Division another four days of bitter fighting before they eventually overran the Greek defences.

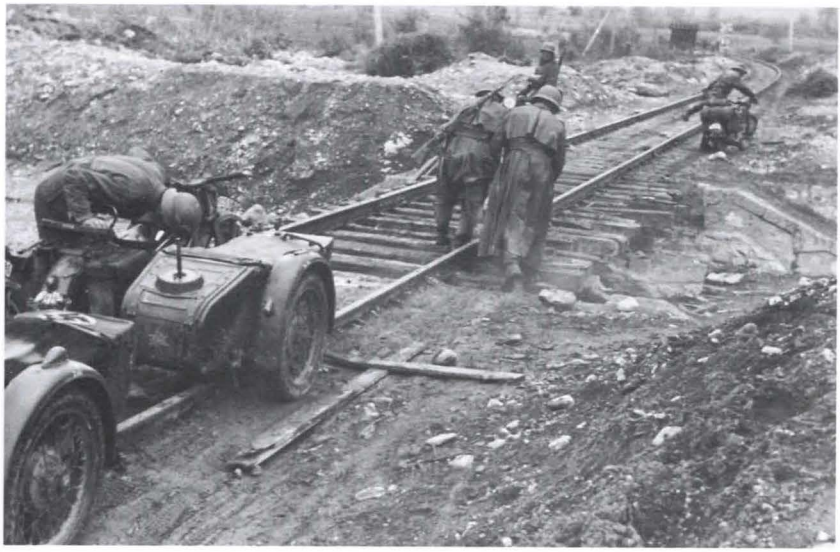
For the soldiers of the 6.Gebirgs-Division, their assault on the Greek defences was less of a struggle and they managed to punch their way through within a single day. The divisions then linked-up and fought a series of battles southwards, towards Corinth, against a British Expeditionary force. By 26 April, Athens capitulated and the last of the British forces were withdrawn towards the seaports for evacuation. In other parts of the Balkans, the 1 and 4 Gebirgs-Division fought a determined battle against a spirited Yugoslavian force. Despite the dreadful conditions and gallant resistance shown by the Yugoslavian Army, they were no match for the *Gebirgsjäger* and their Wehrmacht comrades. It took the Germans just 12 days to crush the Yugoslavian force. Both the 1 and 4.Gebirgs-Divisions had played a crucial part in the Yugoslav campaign and were congratulated personally by Hitler for their achievement.

The last major operation undertaken by the mountain troops in the Balkans was the invasion of Crete. Following the *Fallschirmjäger's* airborne attack on the island, it was the 5.Gebirgs-Divisions objective to storm Crete in a flotilla of Greek fishing boats. Although British warships intercepted them, causing considerable damage and loss, a second attempt was made by air. The *Gebirgsjäger* were dropped over Maleme on 22 May. Against stiff British and Commonwealth resistance, joint *Fallschirmjäger* and *Gebirgsjäger* forces secured the area. In some places, the fighting was so vicious that hand-to-hand combat ensued with terrible casualties. Undoubtedly, the Gebirgsjager showed their worth during the battle of Crete and fought with skill and tenacity. In fact, their achievements were praised by the *Fallschirmjäger* commander, *Generalmajor* Student, for their 'courage under fire'.

Two photographs, taken in sequence, showing a group of NCO's leading their platoon forward into action. The majority of these soldiers hold the rank of *Oberjäger*. During early June, new orders re-directed the *Gebirgs* division's advance to the Aisne, and subsequent orders sent it across the river. After crossing the river, they were suddenly pulled out of the line and rushed by truck to Lyon. Here, the *Gebirgs*-Division was given the objective of striking the rear of the French troops defending the Alps against the Italians.



Three photographs, taken in sequence, showing a motorcycle combination crossing a light wooden pontoon bridge known by the German's as a Bruckengerat 'C' type bridge. The bridge appears to be still in the process of completion as pioneers can be still seen on the bridge working. Note the pontoon boats held in place by ropes attached to the river bank.



Mountain Reconnaissance motorcyclists, of the 1.Gebirgs-Division, use a railway line for navigational purposes. Note the motorcycle combination crew checking the width brackets of the sidecar against the width of the rail line.

Gebirgsjäger officers can be seen being driven across a stream. Like all *Heeres* vehicles, it has been provided with a registration number plate marked in black on a white six or seven-digit number. The 'WH' means it belongs to the 'Wehrmacht Heer'.

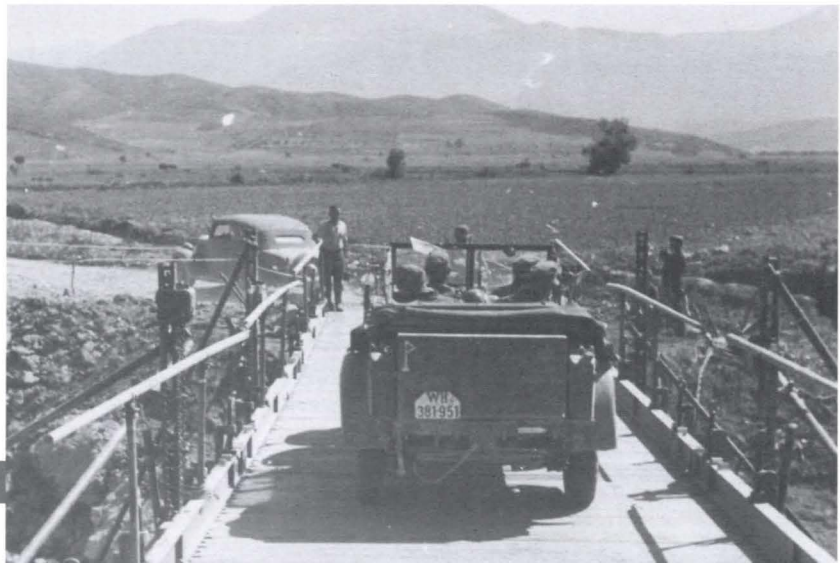
A commander can be seen standing in a Horch cross-country staff car. It appears that he has inspected his unit and is preparing to depart. Note the *Heeres* command flag attached to the front right of the vehicle. The flag on the left fender is a field marshal's flag.

This photograph has been taken in sequence to the above image, showing *Gebirgstruppen* watching the army commander depart after an inspection of their unit. They all wear the familiar standard service uniform and equipment associated with that of the *Gebirgsjäger*.

Two photographs, taken in sequence, showing a unit on a long march. One Gebirgstruppen can be seen carrying the metal staff flag, which identifies it as part of a battalion or regimental headquarters. The colours are black, white and red with a tactical symbol in black. The infantry cart also carries the same metal staff flag.

Gebirgstruppen, with their horses, cross a stream bound for the front line. The horses are carrying a considerable quantity of equipment which was needed by the mountain troops to sustain them in some of the most inhospitable mountainous areas. The troops often had to carry several day's rations as well as additional cold weather clothing and climbing equipment.

A Horch cross country staff car crosses a pontoon bridge during its unit's onward journey. In June 1940, the *Gebirgs* were given the objective of striking the rear of the French troops defending the Alps against the Italians. In the distance, the mountainous region of the Alps can be seen. However, the move was immediately halted and the operation cancelled as the Franco-German armistice came into effect on 25 June. Instead, the mountain troops were given the duty of guarding the frontier and carrying out the tasks of an army operation.



Gebirgstruppen cross into Yugoslavia and can be seen with their mules. The mules were very hardy animals and were the backbone of the *Gebirgsjäger* divisions for transporting equipment across some of the most rugged terrain across Europe and the Soviet Union.

A long column of pack animals with their handlers on a mountain road. These animals were able to spend many hours on the march, fully laden with supplies. They not only carried rations and medical supplies, but also carried ammunition and weapons.

Heavily laden mountain troops and mule-handlers are seen trudging along a mountain road. The soldiers wear heavily loaded Bergen-type rucksacks. Unlike standard *Wehrmacht* soldiers, the troops were also issued with ice axes, hard-lay climbing rope, pitons and piton hammers, carabiners, and avalanche marker cords and flags for use when searching for victims.

Gebirgs mule handlers are seen with their pack animals on a winding road somewhere in the mountainous regions of the Balkans. The animals are well laden with equipment. They are all fitted with special pack harnesses which allowed the mules to carry significant amounts of equipment, in order to sustain the mountain *truppen* for lengthy periods of time, in some of the most inhospitable terrain.

Mountain troop handlers with their pack animals along a snowy road in the mountains. The mules are wearing the special wicker carrier baskets that contained a number of supplies for sustaining the *Gebirgs* on their long march.

Gebirgstruppen, on horse drawn transport, along one of the many hazardous mountain roads from Bulgaria into Yugoslavia in April 1941. The steep mountain slopes and appalling snow blizzards tested the ability of the Gebirgsjäger. The 1 and 4.*Gebirgs*-Divisions had played a crucial part in the Yugoslav campaign.

Ten photographs, taken in sequence, showing *Gebirgstruppen* with an unidentified artillery piece, probably of foreign design. Due to the severe weather conditions, it often took at least two dozen men just to haul one artillery piece of this size through the snow. This artillery piece is being moved by add-on sledge-like skids, but the snow and terrain are being very problematic. Pulling artillery pieces across the snow not only hindered movement of the unit to the battlefield, but frequently sapped the soldier's energy, which was already tested due to the amount of miles that had to be covered daily in some of the most perilous terrain. Yugoslavian forces too were also posing a considerable threat in a number of places, and this also was to test the skill and resilience of the German mountain trooper.

A *Gebirgs* unit moving along a mountain road, which can be seen cleared of snow. These troops that marched and fought in the mountains were self-sufficient and were often in a high state of physical fitness, acclimatized to extreme weather conditions, and were above average marksman.

Troops on a mountain slope pause in their exhausting march. Often the advance through the Balkans was slow and much of the troops that were traversing these mountain slopes were reduced to a crawl. This, in effect, regularly had serious implications to the conduct of fighting.

Two photographs showing a Gebirgs battery on a mountain slope somewhere in Yugoslavia. The guns positioned on the slope are 7.5cm GebG36 *Gebirgschüzte*. There were four or five of these guns in a mountain battery. These mountain guns were well-liked among its crews. The gun had a split trail and the recoil system was a variable system that automatically shortened the recoil as the elevation increased. The disc wheels were lightweight with solid rubber tyres, though some had wood-spoked wheels. There was no splinter shield due to the fact that the gun was primarily designed for mountain use. With no shield, this helped to keep the weight low and enabled the whole weapon to be broken down into eight loads relatively quickly.

Well-equipped *Gebirgstruppe* cross one of the many streams that criss-crossed the mountain slopes in the Balkans. Natural obstacles such as this were a constant hindrance to the advancing units achieving their daily objectives.

Gebirgstruppen pause along a mountain range before resuming their march, traversing the slopes towards enemy positions. Although the Yugoslavian forces were thinly stretched along their entire front, a number of units were able to put up considerable resistance. However, with no in-depth defences and few reserves, the mountain troops were able to smash through and drive onto Belgrade.

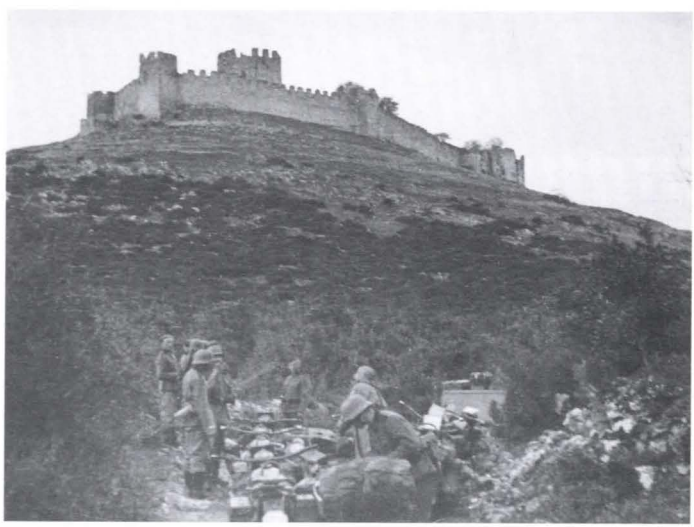
Company command troops pause in their march and converse with each other before resuming their advance down the mountain slope. It was quite common for *Gebirgs* unit commanders to lead an advancing column. Behind the commanders, a long column of troops and pack animals and their handlers can be seen navigating the narrow mountain road.

Terrain in Yugoslavia was not well suited for military traffic, especially in the mountain regions. Here, in this photograph, a *Gebirgs* staff vehicle has become stuck on a mountain road and a number of staff officers and their personnel are seen trying to relieve the vehicle.

Two photographs, taken in sequence, showing heavily equipped troops with heavily loaded pack animals are seen on a march along a mountain road. They pass a stone farm building with corrugated roof, but now probably being utilized by the *Gebirgsjäger* for shelter or storage.

Five photographs showing mountain troops with captured Yugoslavian troops. Despite the terrible conditions and gallant resistance shown by the Yugoslavian Army, they were no match for the *Gebirgsjäger* and their Wehrmacht comrades. It took the Germans just 12 days to crush the Yugoslavian force.

Two photographs, taken in sequence, showing a column of *Gebirgs* motorcycle combinations, which are probably part of a reconnaissance unit operating somewhere in Yugoslavia. The first photograph shows the unit following a railway line. Note the tactical symbol on the motorcycle mudguard indicating that it belongs to the *1.Kompnaie/Gebirgs-Auflarungs-Abteilung 54*. The second photograph shows the troops dismounting from their motorcycles preparing to reconnoitre a hilltop castle.



Three photographs showing the 6x30 Sf.14z *Scherenfernrohr* (scissor binoculars) being used in three different locations on the mountain slopes somewhere in Yugoslavia. These are more than likely a Gebirg artillery forward observation unit. A battery observation post often had two scissor binoculars for engaging an enemy target and searching and plotting for additional enemy positions. Note the tripod-mounted binoculars being used on the slope. The observer can be seen adjusting the range of the binoculars.

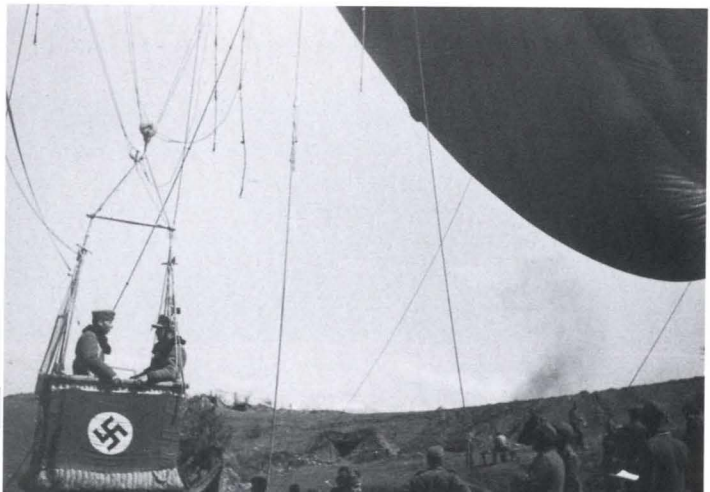
A long column of pack animals advance alongside a road kept clear for motorised traffic. These *Gebirgsjäger* belong to a Sanitation Hospital unit. The wicker carrier baskets display the familiar red crosses on a white background associated with that belonging to a Sanitation unit.

Gebirgs handlers with their pack animals trudge towards the front. Painted on the wicker carrier baskets are the letters 'K.Tr' and Tr'. This abbreviation means 'Trager' or carrier. Behind these animals, in single column, are heavily equipped *Gebirgstruppen*.

Gebirgs machine gun troop are seen trudging through a mountain valley. Both leading men carry a spare MG34 barrel for their 7.9mm MG34 machine gun. These troops belong to the XVIII.Gebirgs-Korps which was attached to the 12.Armee. Their objective was to attack Greece via Yugoslavia.

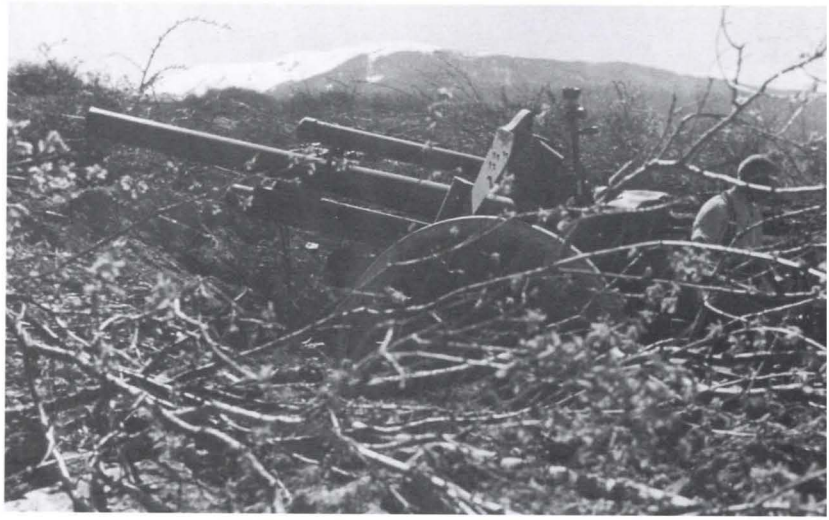
A *Gebirgs* platoon prepare to move out during a pause in their advance. The platoon leader can be seen armed with an MP40 sub machine gun. The soldiers all wear the standard M36 uniform and special grey heavyweight trousers. On their right sleeve they display the famous Edelweiss. For their main armament, the *truppen* carry the Mauser 7.9mm Kar98k carbine, the standard issue *Wehrmacht's* shoulder weapon.

One of the most effective forms of observation, apart from flying, was to use an observation balloon. Here, in these two photographs, taken in sequence, is an artillery observation battery utilising a balloon in a remote area. With almost non-existence of enemy aircraft, balloon observation could be undertaken with little concern. However, it was still vulnerable to attack as the balloon was hydrogen-filled. Two men can be seen inside the balloon basket, one to record data and relay it to the ground by telephone. The other man was the observer who would keep a lookout for the approach of any enemy aircraft.



Commanders are seen on a mountain slope consulting their notebooks as they report the progress of the advance to the *Gebirgs*-Division commander, on the right wearing an officers greatcoat.

A rifle group pause in their advance and have a break in a forest during the early phase of operations against Greece. The standard Gebirgstruppen equipment can be seen, comprising of the two, three-pocket cartridge pouches, for the 7.9mm carbine bolt action rifle, bread bag, canteen or field flask and drink cup, mess kit or cook pot, small entrenching tool and carrier, the S84/98 bayonet, M35 steel helmet, and gas mask canister.



A *Gebirgs* artillery unit during a pause in action along the Yugoslav and Greek frontier, in April 1941. The artillery piece is a 10.5cm le.FH.18 light field howitzer. The gun is well concealed in undergrowth.

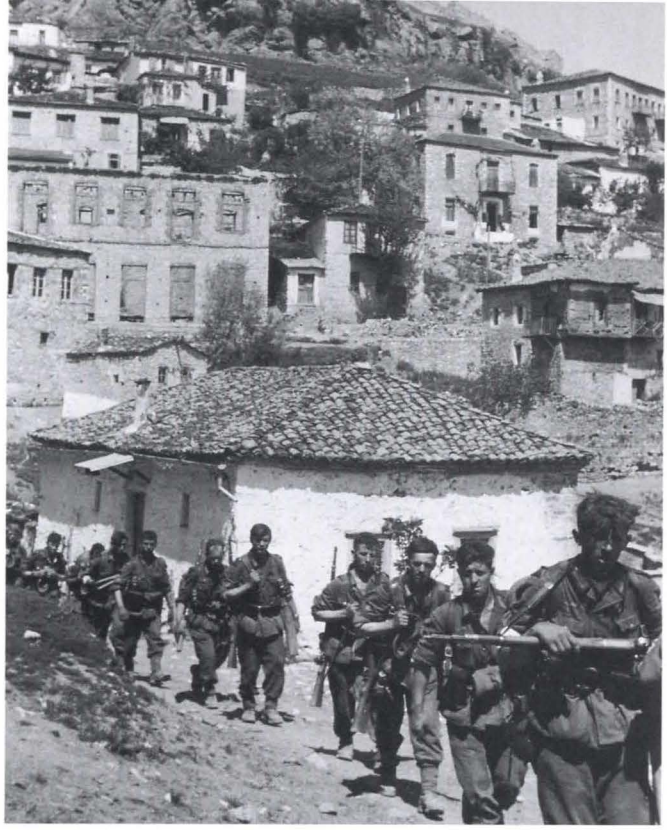
Gebirgstruppen traverse across typical mountain terrain as they pass from the Yugoslav frontier into Greece. Much of the advance was often slow due to the winding roads and uneven, rugged terrain. The troops found the advance frustrating at times and this was made worse by enemy resistance, which could regularly hold up entire units for hours fighting on the slopes.

Gebirgstruppen of the 1.*Gebirgs*-Division have halted in a village and read their divisional weekly newspaper. The officer seated on the motorcycle combination has been decorated with the Iron Cross 2nd Class and the ribbon of the Iron Cross 1st Class.

A *Gebirgs* machine gun squad use the rocky terrain as cover on the mountain slope. The light 7.92mm MG34 machine gun is on its bipod. The squad is relatively concealed, and their uniforms blend-in well with the local terrain. A light machine-gun troop consisted of a machine gunner (Number 1) and two machine gun riflemen (Numbers 2 and 3) to carry ammunition.

Mountain troops take cover on a grassy mountain slope and use the uneven ground as cover. Positions like this often gave troops good fields of observation and fire, and could dominate an enemy on the higher ground.

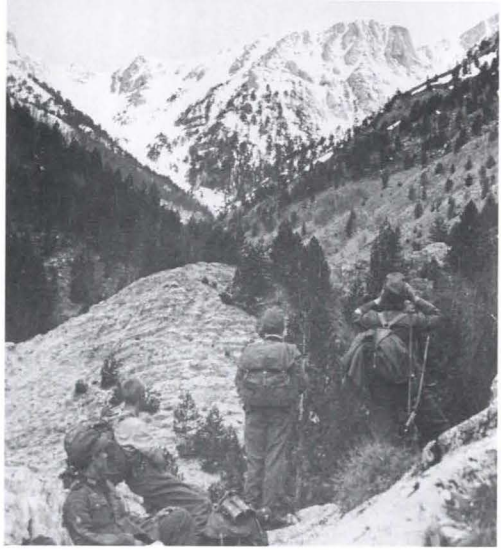
A column of *Gebirgsgruppen* march through a destroyed Greek town, accompanied by pack animals carrying equipment. Both the 5 and 6.*Gebirgs*-Division took part in the attack against Greece. Fighting was heavy in a number of areas but slowly and systematically the mountain troops fought their way through and were able to overrun the Greek defences.



A good view of a column of mountain troops marching through a Greek hillside town. They all wear the standard issue M36 *Wehrmacht* tunic and all carry the Mauser 7.9mm Kar98k carbine, the standard issue *Wehrmacht's* shoulder weapon.

Gebirgsjäger staff cars have halted somewhere in the Balkans. Three staff officers can be seen conversing whilst watching their unit crossing a wooden bridge. These vehicles were very much ill-suited for uneven terrain and were seldom seen off-road driving.

Two photographs showing a mountain trooper and a mountain motorcycle combination moving through a destroyed captured town. These Gebirgs are more than likely part of a mountain reconnaissance battalion that comprised of a battalion staff, motorcycle company, and heavy company.



Gebirgstruppen, in their natural environment, halt on a mountain slope. They wear their high-capacity Bergen-type rucksacks. Unlike the high leather marching boots issued to the *Wehrmacht,* all *Gebirgsjäger* wore low-topped laced marching shoes, which were heavy, sturdy climbing boots and puttees.

A mountain trooper hoists the German national flag from a tall building, somewhere in the Balkans, following the defeat of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia capitulated on 17 April 1941, 11 days after the invasion commenced. German losses were significantly light, which totaled 151 killed, 392 wounded, and 14 missing.

Chapter Three

Eastern Front (1941 – 1944)

Northern Front

For the invasion of Russia, code-named 'Operation Barbarossa', the German Army assembled some three million men, divided into a total of 105 infantry divisions and 32 Panzer divisions. There were 3,332 tanks, over 7,000 artillery pieces, 60,000 motor vehicles and 625,000 horses. This force was distributed into three German army groups: Army Group North, commanded by Field Marshal Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb, had assembled his forces in East Prussia on the Lithuanian frontier. His *Panzergruppe*, which provided the main spearhead for the advance on Leningrad, consisted of 812 tanks. These were divided among the 1, 6 and 8.Panzer-Divisions, 3, 36.Motorised-Infantry-Division and the SS.Motorised-Division *'Totenkopf'*, which formed the *Panzergruppe* reserve.

Among the strong force of Army Group North, the *Gebirgsjäger* were to play a major part in the battle in the East. For the invasion, the 2 and 3.Gebirgs-Divisions, which were part of the *Gebirgs-Korps*, were allocated in the *Gebirgs-Korps Norwegen*.

During the early morning of 22 June 1941, the mountain troopers attacked Russia and followed in the wake of the leading spearheads of the mighty *Panzerwaffe*. On the northern front, the terrain was terrible, comprising of swampland, barren rock and huge dark forests. The area was regarded as so bad that even the local Finns could not believe they were conducting operations in such an inhospitable place. But, despite the appalling conditions and the long marches, they smashed through Soviet defences and reached the River Liza in July 1941. By this time, the Russians had been totally shattered by the weight and accuracy of the German shellfire but also by the skilful deployment of the *Gebirgsjäger* storm troops.

However, in spite the rapid drive of the German soldier into Russia, the Red Army were a complete enigma to him. There was little information supplied about the country in which they were invading, nor was there anything substantial on the terrain and climate. He simply saw the Russians as Slavic people that were an inferior race. Propaganda had made good use to prove conclusively that all Russians were living in poverty and its antiquated army were totally unprepared for war. Even when the German soldier rolled across into Russia, during the summer months of 1941, he was totally unaware of the immense

Gebirgsjäger forces march across into the Soviet Union with Army Group North during the summer of 1941. Among the strong force of Army Group North, the *Gebirgsjäger* were to play a major part in the battle in the East. For the invasion, the 2 and 3.Gebirgs-Divisions, which were part of the *Gebirgs-Korps*, were allocated in the *Gebirgs-Korps Norwegen*.

The roads were appalling in Russia and were often unable to cope with the large volumes of traffic. After a downpour of rain, the roads, which were no more than dirt tracks, were turned into a quagmire, even during the summer period in the north. Here, in this photograph, *Gebirgstruppen*, with their pack animals towing supplies, trudge through the mud towards the front.

From a hill top and *Gebirgs* officers can be seen observing enemy positions. By their position, there appears to be some danger of enemy fire. Note the officer wearing a leather greatcoat watching the forward movement of his troops through a pair of 6x30 field binoculars.

undertaking he had in crushing the enemy. Although the ordinary German found a huge contrast between his own country and that in which he was fighting, they were totally unprepared for the unimaginable size and distance in which they had to march. The soldiers were amazed by the immense forests, the huge expanses of marshland, and the many rivers that were continuously prone to flooding. They were also surprised that the little information they did have, was often incorrect. Maps frequently showed none of the roads, and when they were fortunate enough to come across them, they were in such terrible state of repair that military traffic would often reduce them to nothing more than dirt tracks.

Another great contrast that the German soldier experienced during his march through Russia was the climatic conditions. There were extreme differences in temperature, with the bitter cold sometimes dropping to thirty or even forty degrees below zero, and the terrible heat of the summer when temperatures soared to insufferable levels. When the first snow showers arrived, in October 1941, the German soldier was totally unprepared for a Russian winter. Sleet, and the cold driving rain, turned the Russian countryside into a quagmire with roads and fields becoming virtually impassable. The lack of winter clothing too, caused widespread worry for the soldiers, for they knew that the winter would create graver problems than the Russians themselves.

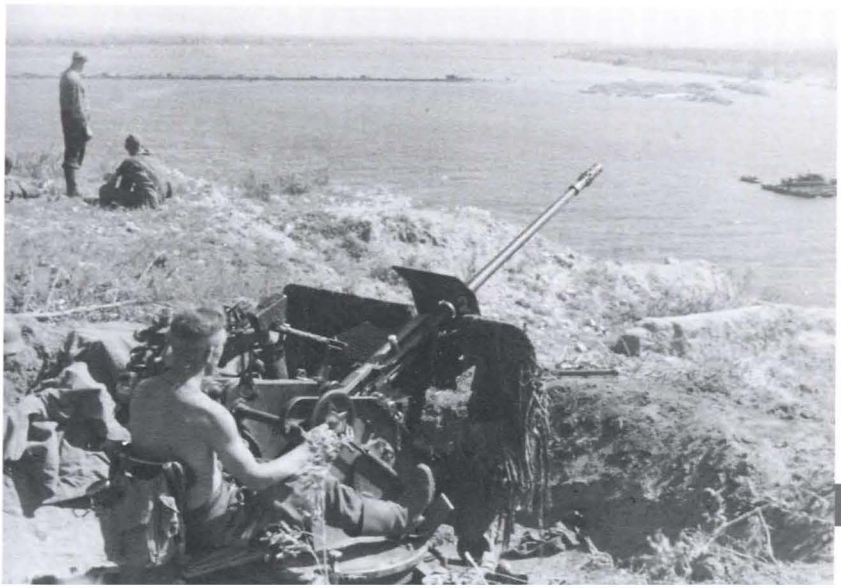
Living and fighting in the winter on the Eastern Front was very difficult, even for the well trained men of the Gebirgsjäger. The distances the soldiers had to travel were immense. The most popular form of transport was by sledge.

Sheltering, too, posed a huge problem and many of them were taught to construct native style shelters from tree branches and build igloos. Although these mountain forces sustained heavy casualties during the winter of 1941, they grimly held the line, and by early 1942, a stalemate developed. Before the spring, only minor skirmishes continued, as both sides rebuilt their strength.

In early spring 1942, the 7.Gebirgs-Division was deployed far north, as the Soviets unleashed their new offensive. For weeks and months, the mountain troops fought a battle of attrition, trying to prevent the Soviets cutting them off. A series of vicious Russian assaults nearly succeeded, but the arrival of bad weather, once again, deprived the Red Army of victory. By the time the bad weather had improved, the *Gebirgsjäger* had brought up additional reserves and equipment. The Russian offensive failed and the mountain troopers were able to spend the next two years, until 1944, patrolling the northern sector.

In the summer of 1944, the Red Army launched another offensive on the Northern Front. The attack was so fierce that the Finns concluded a separate peace with the Russians, in September 1944. With the prospect of being cut off, all German troops, including those of the *Gebirgsjäger*, were pulled back through

Overlooking the Baltic coast is a 2cm FlaK 30 anti-aircraft gun. This FlaK gun weighed some 770kg and had an effective ceiling range of 2,200 meters against aerial targets. In the *Gebirgsjäger,* these guns were operated by light flak companies and were used extensively to protect both mountain troops and Wehrmacht forces against enemy aerial attacks. They could also be used in a ground defensive role too, with great effect.



Lapland into Norway, whilst at the same time combating Norwegian troops who had now turned against them.

Southern Front

On the Southern Front, mountain troops saw more extensive action against the Red Army than those operations conducted in the north. In June 1941, the 1 and 4.Gebirgs-Divisions were involved in the rapid advances which followed the invasion of Russia. The soldiers covered some 35-miles each day and maintained this truly remarkable progress, day after day, week after weary week. During these early days, morale was high. They smashed through the Stalin Line and conducted vigorous attacks deep into enemy territory. They had also participated in the encirclement of the Uman pocket, which saw 100,000 Red Army troops being marched into captivity. *The Gebirgs-Korps* alone captured 22,000 prisoners. This, in itself, was a great victory and for weeks and months that followed, the mountain troops pushed further east towards Stalino, which was captured in November 1941. They then advanced to positions by the River Mius where winter was fast approaching.

In July 1942, the *Gebirgsjäger* took part in the drive on the Caucasus Mountains. It was here that the soldiers were able to exhibit their Alpine skills

Three photographs, taken from the same slide, showing SS-Division *Nord* during action against enemy positions in a wooded area. The division saw action on the Norwegian–Finnish border and began hostilities against the Russians, in June 1941, in an Operation, code-named 'Arctic Fox'. During a battle at Salla, against strong Russian forces, *Nord* suffered 300 killed and 400 wounded in the first two days of the invasion.

and scale some of the highest peaks in the Caucasus range. On Mount Elbrus, they managed to plant the German national flag. By the end of 1942, as the city of Stalingrad was about to fall, the 1 and 4 Gebirgs-Divisions were withdrawn, barely escaping the clutches of the Red tide. Both divisions halted at the Kuban bridgehead, where they fought until the autumn of 1943, in mosquito-infested marshland.

At the end of the year, the 5.Gebirgs-Division was withdrawn from the Leningrad sector where it saw extensive action on the Southern Front. But, despite the stiffening of German forces in the south, nothing could prevent the growing strength of the Soviet Army. By early 1944, over four million Russian soldiers were now being thrown at the exhausted troops. Even the elite Waffen-SS Gebirgs-Divisions could do nothing to stem the rapid enemy onslaught. By mid-May, the Red Army overran the Crimea and was remorselessly bearing down on the Carpathian Mountains.

The end in the East seemed imminent. Hitler began taking drastic steps to try and hold the Russians from overrunning the Hungarian oilfields. To bear the brunt of this massive defence strategy, the 1. Gebirgs-Division, now attached to parts of the 2.Panzer-Armee, took part in the offensive around the area of the Platensee.

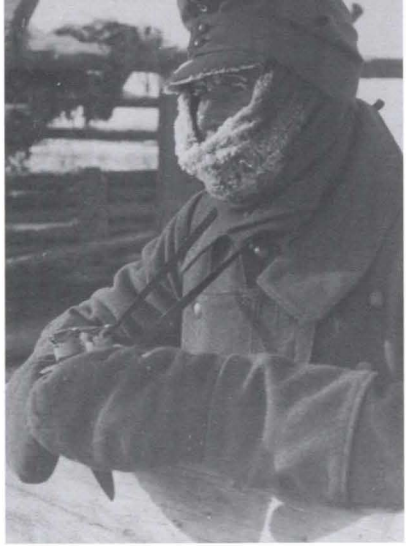
On 5 March 1944, the attack began in earnest, but the spring thaw turned the countryside into a sea of mud and almost immediately the troops of the 2.Panzer-Armee were bogged down in the mire. As for the *Gebirgsjäger*, they could still move with their pack animals, and, during the first ten days, they made good progress. But then their advance ground to a halt. Along the disintegrating German front, a mere handful of units, including the 1.Gebirgs-Division and the 13.*Waffen-Gebirgs-Division der SS 'Handschar'*, mainly composed of Bosnian Moslems, faced a massive Russian Army of some 40 divisions. Under the pulverizing effects of the Russian troops and their artillery, both the 2.Panzer-Armee and the 6.SS.Panzer-Armee were forced to withdraw. As the bulk of the German forces retreated under a hurricane of fire, it was up to the 1.Gebirgs-Division to fight back the Soviet force whilst the remnants of the Wehrmacht clawed its way westward.

Gebirgstruppen from the new SS-Division *Nord* during operations in the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. A motorcycle combination is following a Pz.Kpfw.II towards the battlefront watched by soldiers on the edge of the road. SS Kampfgruppe *Nord* was formed in February 1941, from two SS *Totenkopf* Regiments. The designation changed to SS-Division *Nord* in September 1941, and again in September 1942, to SS *Gebirgs*-Division *Nord*, and finally to 6th SS *Gebirgs*-Division *Nord.*

Nord truppen in action with their 3.7cm PaK35/36. Even though the PaK35/36 had become inadequate for operational needs, in the face of growing armoured opposition, they were still quite capable of causing some serious damage to their opponent.

A *Nord* MG34 machine gun crew with their weapon attached to a Lafette 34 sustained-fire mount with optical sight. Note the special pads on the front of the tripod. These were specifically used when the weapon was being carried on the carriers back. The pads would allow the carrier some reasonable comfort.

Here, *Gebirgstruppen* hold a morning formation inside a Russian village. They are all wearing the standard *Gebirgsjäger* uniform. Once their commander had finished lecturing his men, the troops would disperse and prepare for their daily duties in the snow. This would first consist of the soldiers donning their winter camouflage smocks and standard field equipment.



Three photographs showing a *Gebirgsjäger* wearing the special woolen toque beneath the *Bergmütze*. Typically, troops wore two toques in the extreme arctic conditions, as these photographs vividly illustrate. One was worn over the head to protect the ears and face, and one around the neck. The toques main purpose was intended to keep the head warm whilst wearing the steel helmet, which during winter operations in the east, the soldiers referred them as like a 'freezer box'. Along with the toque, the soldier either wore the winter white camouflage smock or the standard issue greatcoat with insulated two-finger mittens.

Five photographs showing an SS-Division *Nord* ski patrol during operations in Army Group North, during the winter of 1942. They are all wearing the early winter camouflage smocks over their uniforms and fur covered head-dress. The fur covered caps were issued to German troops serving in the East during the winter of 1942. Most of the men are carrying over their shoulder the Kar98k carbine bolt action rifle, which was distributed to all infantrymen during the war. Of particular interest, many of the ski troops can be seen wearing the coloured friend-or-foe recognition stripes on both sleeves.

Inside a Russian village and a *Gebirgsjäger* award ceremony is being undertaken. The soldier on the left, wearing a whitewashed M35 steel helmet, holds the rank of an *Oberleutnant* and congratulates a *Leutnant* on his award of the Iron Cross 2nd Class.

Three Gebirgs soldiers pause in their march following a ski patrol. During the snow months in Russia, especially during the second winter period, the new practical loose-fitting hooded snow overalls were worn, purely designed to wear over many layers of clothing, including the greatcoat. These men are wearing thick woolen gloves and a woolen toque for the head. Two of the men wear tinted ski goggles over their *Bergmütze* field cap. They are armed with the 7.92mm Mauser Gew33/40 rifles, which were slightly shorter than the standard Kar98k carbine.

Gebirgs soldiers using a sled to move from one part of the front to another. Even by 1942, the majority of motive power within the regiments of the infantry divisions was mainly animal draught. As a consequence, many hundreds of thousands of horses died either due to combat action, or succumbed to the extreme weather, lack of forage, or were eaten by starving soldiers.

Gebirgstruppen approach a forest in deep snow during operations on the *Ostfront* in 1942. Signs of enemy movement were often easier to identify in the snow, and a vigilant patrol could quickly detect the location of their enemy by fresh foot prints and snow knocked off bushes and other disturbed foliage.

A mountain trooper on a ski patrol. He wears the standard issue *Gebirgs* rucksack, which appears to be heavily laden with supplies. In order to camouflage him in the snow he wears the snow overall. The snow overall was large and shapeless and worn without a belt over any of the uniform and all equipment. However, in spite of being produced in high numbers to the *Gebirgsjäger,* this item of clothing did not prove to be as practical as other camouflage smocks, as it tended to restrict the wearers freedom of movement.

An MG34 machine gun squad advance through a wooded area to a new firing position. They wear the two piece snow suit and white washed M35 steel helmets. In snow, soldiers found it necessary to apply white paint over the steel helmet. Initially, during the first winter of 1941, many troops did not attempt to apply their steel helmets with any type of white camouflage, often leaving them in the field-grey. However, some did attempt to find a solution in order for them to blend in with the local terrain. A number of soldiers found that chalk was very useful and applied this crudely over the entire helmet. But it was whitewash paint that became the most widely used form of winter camouflage.

Weary infantry rest in a wooded area and try to sleep in the snow after enduring probably many days of bitter fighting against stiffening Russian resistance. The troops are compelled to protect themselves against the bitter temperatures with *Zeltbahn* shelter-quarters. Foliage from the surrounding pine trees would also have been used as bedding to keep the men dry. For the German forces on the Eastern Front there was little respite – if the Red Army let up for a brief period, the sub zero temperatures certainly did not.

Supply vehicles for Gebirgsjager and Wehrmacht front line troops have halted on a congested road. During the winter on the Ostfront, wheeled forms of transportation were frequently immobilised due to the extreme weather conditions. Consequently, this would hamper supplies to the front line and occasionally bring an advance to a stall.

For local defence, an MG34 machine gun is seen mounted on an anti-aircraft tripod mount. Throughout the war, support units were issued with light machine guns for self-defence and were able to counter low flying enemy aircraft quite regularly. The *Gebirgs* machine gunner wears the animal skin fur coat, issued for use to German troops driving vehicles or on guard duties on the Eastern Front during the winter.

A well camouflaged Pz.Kpfw.III has halted on a congested road. One of the crewman watches a long column of Panjewagens pass by. These troops are part of the *SS Gebirgs* Division *Nord*, and are more than likely transporting divisional rations and equipment to frontline troops.

Two photographs showing two different artillery observation posts using the 6x30 Sf.14Z *Scherefernrohr* or scissor binoculars, searching for enemy targets. Each artillery battery had an observation post among the frontline positions. However, in extreme arctic conditions, the lenses sometimes iced over, hampering the surveillance of the frontlines.

Two photographs, taken in sequence, showing a 7.5cm Geb36 gun being loaded and then fired by its well trained crew. Firing an artillery piece in the snow could be frequently problematic for the gun crew. The recoil would regularly drive the weapon deep into the snow and would often cause inaccurate firing. For this reason, a number of gun crew sometimes modified their 7.5cm Geb36 gun, removing its wheels and replacing them with sturdy gun trails.

Two Pz.Kpfw.II's can be seen passing pioneers attached to the SS Gebirgs Division *Nord,* in 1942. The area can be seen totally devastated by either heavy artillery or air bombardments. Whilst this type of tactical bombardment served the Germans well, during the winter the lack of shelter was often problematic for the soldiers.

Soldiers of the *SS Gebirgs* Division *Nord* stand beside two stationary Pz.Kpfw.II tanks during operations on the Kestenga front. The soldier standing to the left of the motorcyclist, who is wearing the special motorcycle protective suit, appears to be armed with a captured Russian 7.62mm Mosin-Nagant M1891/30 rifle. The Germans designated this Soviet weapon as the Gew252(r).

A convoy of supply trucks carrying men and equipment has halted along a road. Some of the mountain troops have dismounted from their vehicles and are seen standing near a stream. It is more than probable that this is a temporary stop and the column would have resumed its drive.

Soldiers of the 6.SS-Division-Nord in one of a number of shelters erected along the stagnate front. Although such shelters did not provide much, in terms of protection to the men against enemy fire, they certainly provided the soldiers with adequate shelter against the bitter elements.

A road march, during the summer of 1943, in Army Group South. The pack animals are well laden with equipment and a number of them can be seen attached with basket carriers, which were commonly used by the *Gebirgsjäger* to carry their rations and other vital supplies needed to sustain them in some of the most inhospitable places on the Ostfront.

An interesting photograph showing a *Gebirgs* Artillery unit on a long march. One of the pack animals can be seen towing a 7.5cm GebG36, which was the standard artillery piece used by the mountain troops during the war in the East.

Apart from towing ordnance, the pack animals were also well adapted for carrying artillery. Here, in this photograph, pack handlers and their animals rest before resuming their march. A 7.5cm GebG36 has been broken down into eight loads for transportation. Note the mule carrying the spoke wheels for the gun.

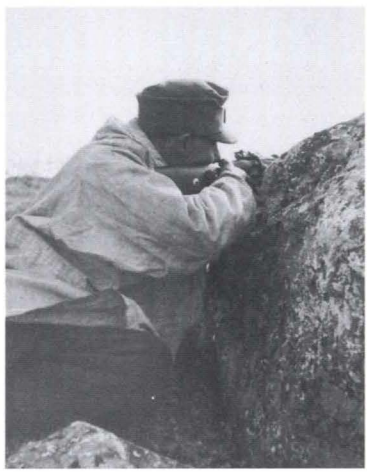
Two mountain troop motorcyclists can be seen with their BMW motorcycles in a stream, cleaning their dusty vehicles. By this period of the war, many of the motorcyclists were used for dispatch purposes to various sections of the front, and because motorcycles were regarded as versatile machines, it enabled them to move swiftly across terrain with important information.

Two troop leaders can be seen halted on a road with their unit. The troop leader, wearing his M35 steel helmet and 6x30 field binoculars, wears the 1st pattern MP38/40 magazine pouches for his MP38/40 sub-machine gun. By 1941, the MP38/40 sub-machine gun was manufactured in great numbers, and issued to squad leaders, senior NCOs and front line officers.

A *Gebirgs* FlaK 30 gun in an elevated position. The guns usual shield has been removed, probably to lighten the weight. Normally, the shields were used when the gun was being utilized against a ground target.

A group of mountain troops push a sanitation vehicle up a steep gradient. It is unlikely that any of these men are part of the medical personnel, except one seen wearing a white overall. Normally, all medical aide-men wore the Red Cross on a white armband.

Out in a field and the crew of a 7.5cm GebG36 are seen poised in a field with their gun in an elevated position. Note, the *Gebirgs* crew wearing the silver *Jäger* cap badge of three oak leaves and an acorn as worn by *Jäger*-Divisions.



Three photographs showing a *Gebirgsjäger* taking aim with his carbine 98K bolt action rifle. He wears the camouflage wind jacket which was similar in design to that of the Waffen-SS camouflage smock. It was made of waterproof fabric, and he is seen here wearing white-side out. The other side of the jacket was printed in three colours, similar to that of the Wehrmacht splinter jacket.

Five photographs showing *Gebirgs* troops during operations on the Ostfront. As with many *Gebirgsjäger* units during winter operations, they are using animal draught to tow sleds full of supplies. Although the *Gebirgsjäger* continued to fight hard to hold their positions, they were constantly subject to intense bombardments by whole divisions of Soviet artillery. Difficulties of terrain, too, hindered communications between the units, especially in the snow. One of the quickest and effective methods of moving from one part of the front to another was either by ski or sled.

A ski patrol can be seen moving towards some high-ground. Shelter for the soldiers was often at a premium, especially when evacuating a position. Quite frequently, out in the snow, soldiers were compelled not only to build various forms of shelter to combat the arctic temperatures, but to protect themselves against enemy fire.

Two commanders scrutinize a map during defensive operations in Army Group South. The officer on the right is wearing another variety of animal skin fur coat. His comrade wears the familiar white camouflage smock and can clearly be seen wearing the coloured friend-or-foe recognition stripe on his sleeve.

A snow ski patrol prepares to leave camp. The two ski soldiers nearest to the camera are wearing the shapeless two-piece snowsuit comprising of a snow jacket and matching trousers. The jacket was buttoned all the way down the front with white painted buttons. It had a large white hood, which could easily be pulled over the steel helmet. The hood not only helped conceal the headgear if it had not already received any type of winter covering, but also afforded protection to the back of the wearer's neck and to the ears. The trousers were also shapeless and were tucked into the boots.

Gebirgstruppen march in close formation across the snow. Without their white camouflage smocks these soldiers would have undoubtedly been vulnerable to enemy air attack. Close formation marching like this was commonly used by the *Gebirgsjäger*, especially in arctic weather conditions where the soldiers would be able to stay in close proximity to each other, especially in low visibility.

Ski troops transport an injured comrade on a sled to a makeshift field hospital. Living and fighting in sub-zero temperatures was very difficult for the Germans, even for hardened veterans fighting their second winter in Russia. In a number of areas, in Northern Russia, wheeled transport was generally useless in the trackless wastes and forests, and often the most effective means of transport was the sled.

Gebirgs soldiers supported by animal draught advance along a road. A supply vehicle can be seen passing the column.

Mule drawn lf.8 infantry carts of the 1.*Gebirgs*-Division can be seen crossing a stream. Note the reluctant bull attached to the cart. The 1.*Gebirgs*-Division fought on the southern flank of the Eastern Front, fighting at Kiev, Stalino, the Dnepr crossing, and Kharkov, before moving into the Caucasus during Operation *Blau*. After the defeat at Stalingrad, it spent time in Greece and Serbia before retreating to Austria, until it finally surrendered.

Weary and exhausted *Gebirgstruppen* during their withdrawal through southern Russia, in the late summer of 1943. After the defeat at Stalingrad, the 1 and 4 Gebirgs-Divisions were withdrawn, barely escaping the clutches of the Red tide. Both divisions halted at the Kuban bridgehead where they fought until the autumn of 1943 in mosquito-infested marshland.

Two photographs showing the terrible road conditions endured on the Eastern Front, in the autumn of 1943. Two vehicles and a motorcyclist from the 1.*Gebirgs*-Division struggle through the mire after a heavy downpour of rain. Roads in the Soviet Union were few, and cross-country travel often caused its own problems. Coupled with the sheer size of the country, the Russian weather offered the invaders considerably greater challenges than on any other front during the war.

Pack mule handlers rest with their animals. The vast distances in which these animals and their handlers had to travel can well be imagined. Typical Russian steppes comprised of nothing but vast expanses of flat terrain, stretching for as far as the eye could see. Due to the visible landmarks, units were often unable to determine their exact location.

A long column of mule pack handlers with their animals trudge along a muddy road, passing stationary vehicles and a motorcycle that has obviously developed a mechanical problem. The mules were versatile and sturdy animals and often endured painful long marches with little provision. Note the special canvas tarpaulin covers to protect the pack-loads.

Chapter Four

Last Months (1944 – 1945)

In the last months of the war, German forces continued receding across a scarred and devastated wasteland. On both the Western and Eastern Fronts, the last agonising moments of the war were played out. On the Western Front, in order to try and help stabilize the deteriorating situation, the *Gebirgsjäger* troops were deployed following the failure of the Ardennes offensive. Known as Operation 'Northwind', elements of 6.SS.Gebirgs-Division 'Nord' were thrust into the line in a drastic attempt to hold back the advancing Allies in the Vosges region. Though these Waffen-SS mountain troopers were now well-seasoned veterans from the Eastern Front, the offensive was doomed from the start. Nonetheless, supported by the 2.Gebirgs-Division, the 6.SS.Gebirsg-Division 'Nord' pressed home its attacks and caused severe damage on a number of American units. Although the Americans were superior in both armour and infantry, they were masters at fighting in the surrounding pinewoods. The mountain troops, Alpine skills unnerved the American troops and in some sectors reduced their fighting abilities. However, despite the superior tactics of the *Gebirgsjäger*, the long exposure of battle, coupled with heavy losses, reduced combat efficiency of the mountain troops.

Despite their gradual deterioration, they continued to fight on, withdrawing steadily as British and American troops advanced towards the River Rhine. In the East too they fought tenaciously against the terrifying advance of the Red Army as its powerful force bore down on the River Oder, pushing back the last remnants of Hitler's exhausted units. The resistance of her once mighty armies were now collapsing amid the ruins of the *Reich*. Most of the so called *Waffen-SS* crack divisions were still embroiled in heavy fighting in Hungary and were unable to be released, in order to plug the massive gaps on the German front lines in the East. Many of the volunteers, spurred on by the worrying prospect of Russian occupation of Europe and certain death if captured, were determined to defend to the bitter end and try to hold back the Red Army advance.

In Hungary, the situation was dire. In order to try and help stall the mighty onslaught of the Soviet thrust to Budapest, the Gebirgsjäger fought bitterly to protect the Hungarian oilfields. With skill and tenacity, the mountain troopers held their lines in a number of places, in spite of the overwhelming strength of the enemy. But, once again, dwindling reserves meant that they were unable to retain

Gebirgsjäger rest on a mountainside. Behind them sits a captured bullet riddled bunker that suggests there has been signs of some significant fighting in the area. Both soldiers wear the *Zeltbahn*. The *Zeltbahn* was designed with a slit in the middle for the wearer's head and could be worn comfortably over the shoulders, hanging down to protect the army field service uniform and field equipment. When worn like this, the *Zeltbahn* was known by the troops as the *Regenmantel* or rain cape.

A *Gebirgsjäger* MG34 machine gun squad on a mountainside during operations against Red Army forces. All the troops wear the *Zeltbahn*. When the wearer no longer required the use of the *Zeltbahn,* it was usually rolled up and fitted to the personal equipment with two leather straps. The *Zeltbahn* was also sometimes seen attached to the D rings of the 'Y' straps, or to the back of the leather belt.

their meagre positions and reluctantly pushed back, with heavy loss in men and material.

Whilst a number of Gebirgsjager formations fought to almost to distinction across the wastelands of Hungary, during the third week of January 1945, the Russians began their great winter offensive. The principal objective was to crush the remaining German forces in Poland, East Prussia and the Baltic states. Along the Baltic, an all-out Russian assault had begun in earnest, with the sole intention to crush the remaining understrength German units that had once formed Army Group North. It was these heavy, sustained attacks that eventually restricted the German-held territory in the north-east to a few small pockets of land surrounding three ports: Libau, Kurland, Pillau in East Prussia and Danzig at the mouth of the River Vistula.

Here, along the Baltic, the German defenders attempted to stall the massive Russian push with the remaining weapons and men they had at their disposal. Every German soldier defending the area was aware of the significance if it was captured. Not only would the coastal garrisons be cut off and eventually destroyed, but also masses of civilian refugees would be prevented from escaping from those ports by sea. Hitler made it quite clear that all remaining forces, including the *Gebirgsjäger*, were not to evacuate, but to stand and fight and wage an unprecedented battle of attrition.

In southwest Poland, situated on the River Oder, the strategic town of Breslau had been turned into a fortress and defended by various *Volkssturm*, *Hitlerjugend*, *Waffen-SS*, *Gebirgsjäger* and various formations from the 269.Infantry-Division. During mid-February 1945, the German units put up a staunch defence with every available weapon that they could muster. As the battle ensued, both German soldiers and civilians were cut to pieces by Russian attacks. During these viscous battles, which endured until May 1945, there were many acts of courageous fighting. By the first week of March, Russian infantry had driven back the defenders into the inner city and were pulverising it, street by street. When defence of Breslau finally capitulated, almost 60,000 Russian soldiers were killed or wounded trying to the capture the town, with some 29,000 German military and civilian casualties.

With every defeat and withdrawal came ever-increasing pressure on the commanders to exert harsher discipline on their weary men. The thought of fighting on German soil for the first time resulted in mixed feelings among the soldiers. Although the defence of the *Reich* automatically stirred emotional feelings to fight for their land, not all soldiers felt the same way. More and more young conscripts were showing signs that they did not want to die for a lost cause. Conditions on the Eastern Front were miserable, not only for the newest recruits, but also for battle-hardened soldiers who had survived many months of bitter

Two *Gebirgsjäger* soldiers can be seen wearing the *Zeltbahn*. Both soldiers are wearing two *Zeltbahn's* in order to give them even extra added protection from the rain. The *Zeltbahn* was designed to be worn around the wearer's body in a number of ways and there had been a wartime army manual produced giving various illustrations to the method of wear, depending on whether the soldier was marching, horse riding, riding a bicycle or just in the field wearing it as a rain cape. Note the soldier wearing the standard issue greatcoat with a Stg24 stick grenade inside his black leather infantryman's belt.

An MG34 machine gun squad, with their commanding officer, poses for the camera in a wooded area. All the squad, except for the officer, who wears the standard army issue Greatcoat, is wearing the *Zeltbahn* shelter quarter. During the last years of the war, the manufacturers changed the appearance of the *Zeltbahn*. It was no longer in two tones, but consisted of just the lighter of the two.

conflict against the Red Army. The cold harsh weather during February and March prevented the soldiers digging trenches more than a metre down. But the main problems that confronted the German forces during this period were shortages of ammunition, fuel and vehicles. Some vehicles in a division could only be used in an emergency and battery fire was strictly prohibited without permission from the commanding officer. The daily ration, on average, per division was for two shells per gun.

With such drastic restrictions of every kind, tens of thousands of under-nourished civilians, mostly women, alongside remaining slave labourers, were marched out to expend all their available energy to dig lines of anti-tank ditches. Most of the ditches were dug between the Vistula and Oder Rivers, as a secondary line of defence. However, German forces were now barely holding the wavering Vistula positions that ran some 175 miles from the Baltic coast to the juncture of the Oder and Neisse in Silesia. Most of the front was now held on the western bank of the Oder. In the north, the ancient city of Stettin, capital of Pomerania, and in the south, the town of Kustrin, were both vital holding points against the main Russian objective of the war - Berlin.

As the great Red Army drive gathered momentum, more towns and villages fell to the onrushing forces. Suicidal opposition from a few *SS*, *Wehrmacht* and *Gebirgsjäger* strong points, bypassed in earlier attacks, reduced buildings to blasted rubble. Everywhere, it seemed, the Germans were being constantly forced to retreat. Many isolated units spent hours or even days fighting a bloody defence. Russian soldiers frequently requested them to surrender and assured them that no harm would come to them if they did so. But despite this reassuring tone, most German troops continued to fight to the bitter end. To the average mountain trooper in 1945 they were fighting an enemy that they not only despised, but also were terrified of. Many soldiers, especially those fighting in the ranks of the *Waffen-SS*, decided that their fate would be met out on the battlefield. To them, they would rather bleed, fighting on the grasslands of Eastern Europe, than surrender and be at the mercy of a Russian soldier.

By early April, the atmosphere among the troops of *Heeresgruppe* Vistula became a mixture of terrible foreboding and despair as the Russians prepared to push forward on the River Oder. Here, along the Oder and Neisse fronts, the troops waited for the front to become engulfed by the greatest concentration of firepower ever amassed by the Russians. General Zhukov's, 1st Belorussian Front and General Konev's ,1st Ukrainian Front were preparing to attack German forces defending positions east of Berlin. For the attack, the Red Army mustered some 2.5 million men, divided into four armies. They were supported by 41,600 guns and heavy mortars as well as 6,250 tanks and self-propelled guns.

The final battle, before Berlin began at dawn on 16 April 1945. When the Soviet

Gebirgs motorcyclists have halted at a side of a road. Behind them are two stationary 15cm sFH18 heavy field howitzers being towed by prime movers. The 15cm field howitzer was primarily designed to attack targets deep into the enemy rear. This included command posts, reserve units, assembly areas, and logistic facilities. A heavy mountain gun battery often comprised of 3 batteries, fielding the 15cm howitzer. However, these guns were heavy and cumbersome for the *Gebirgsjäger*, especially in mountainous areas.

An interesting photograph showing *Luftwaffe truppen* assembling a 2cm FlaK30 anti-aircraft gun along a mountain ridge. This unit probably belongs to a light flak *Gebirgsjäger* air defence battalion of the *Luftwaffe*.

forces finally attacked, during the early morning of 16 April, the Germans were ready to meet them on the Seelow Heights. From the top of the ridge, hundreds of German flak guns that had been hastily transferred from the Western Front, poured a hurricane of fire into the enemy troops. All morning, shells and gunfire rained down on the Red Army, blunting their assault. By dusk the Russians, savagely mauled by the attack, fell back. It seemed the Red Army had under-estimated the strength and determination of their enemy.

By the next day, the Russians had still not breached the German defences. But General Zhukov, with total disregard of casualties, was determined to batter the enemy into submission and ruthlessly bulldoze his way through. Slowly and systematically, the Red Army began smashing through their opponents. Within hours, hard-pressed and exhausted German troops were feeling the full brunt of the assault. Confusion soon swept the decimated lines. Soldiers who had fought doggedly from one fixed position to another were now seized with panic.

In three days of constant fighting, thousands of German soldiers had perished. Despite their attempts to blunt the Red Army, the road to Berlin was finally wrenched wide open. At this crucial moment, a number of top quality *SS* soldiers, along with a motley assortment of Gebirgsjäger troops, had been gathered in the recently established *11.Panzer-Armee* under the command of *SS-Obergruppenführer* Felix Steiner. All of these troops were to take part in the last, apocalyptic struggle to save the *Reich* capital from the clutches of the Red Army.

By 25 April, Berlin was completely surrounded, and the next day some half a million Soviet troops bulldozed their way through the city. German reinforcements consisted of fewer than 5,000 *Luftwaffe* personnel, *Hitlerjugend*, *Wehrmacht*, *Waffen-SS* and *Gebirgsjäger* troops, with many of them armed with hand-held weapons. The city was doomed.

For the next week the battle for Berlin raged. What was left of the mountain troops in the city were seen fighting bitterly with members of the *Waffen-SS*, *Hitlerjugend*, *Volkssturm*, *Luftwaffe* and *Wehrmacht* troops. Here, the soldiers were ordered to fight to the death and anyone found deserting or shirking from their duties were hunted down by *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler's personal Escort battalion and hanged from the nearest lamppost. But even in the last days of the war, the *Gebirgsjäger* proved to be an efficient and formidable fighting machine. Even as the last hours were fought out in the fiery cauldron of Berlin, mountain troop units, lacking all provisions including many types of weapons, effectively halted and stemmed a number of Russian assaults.

Two photographs showing heavily burdened mules with their handlers along a narrow mountain road. Signals equipment has been loaded onto the animals. In the first photograph, a field telephone reel can be identified attached to the side of the mule's pannier. Mountain troops had to carry more personal supplies than that of a regular infantryman, as they could not always be regularly supplied whilst in mountainous regions.

A *Gebirgs* soldier leads a mule up a steep mountain slope. The animal is towing an If.18 infantry cart, which is probably being used to carry vital supplies. The carts were designed to be used over very rough or steep terrain, and one cart was allotted to each rifle platoon.

Gebirgs officers stand on a mountain slope and watch a signalman pulling a telephone reel. This type of reel could be drawn by hand, as in this photograph, or behind a bicycle. Often the cables were connected on poles to a radio truck (Funkkraftwagen). However, for speed on the battlefield, signalmen frequently laid them on the ground, but the cables were susceptible to breakages from passing traffic running over them. This signalman would be part of a signals battalion. A signals battalion provided both field and radio communications support within the division, linking all subordinate units.

Two photographs showing a unit command post dug-in on a mountain slope. Map cases and various paperwork can be seen on the table, allowing the officers to make any minor adjustments quickly. Note the two field telephones on the table, allowing a vital communication link between other command centres and front lines.

At the base of a hillside, *Gebirgstruppen* can be seen erecting what appear to be anti-personnel obstacles from foraged wood. The soldiers all wear the sage green windbreaker jackets specially issued to the *Gebirgsjäger*.

A unit command post situated on a mountain slope. All three officers survey the terrain ahead using their 6x30 field binoculars. From this location, the commanders had an exceedingly good vantage point and were able to pin-point their enemy or the position of their forces with great accuracy.

Two photographs showing a *Gebirgsjäger* unit establishing a number of shelter quarter tents and a bivouac on the reverse slope of a ridge. In the first photograph, a commander wearing the officers greatcoat stands and watches as two of his men apply the finishing touches to the tent by camouflaging it with branches.

Heavily equipped *Gebirgstruppen* pass through a village. One soldier can be seen filling his extra large water bottle from a communal cistern. There appears little time for rest and the troops move off to join their unit.

A well camouflaged *Gebirgs* battalion command post. Note the battalion command flag. Sitting next to it is a portable radio set. These portable radio sets were widely used during the war and could be carried in two parts by the radiomen, on specially designed back-pack frames.

NCO *Gebirgs* handlers pause in their march with their pack animals. Note the handler utilizing his Bergen-type rucksack as a makeshift seat. He is armed with the Kar98k bolt action rife and, attached to his black leather infantryman's belt, is his S84/98 bayonet or sidearm, as it was commonly referred to.

Commanders scrutinize a map which has been sprawled across the bonnet of a stationary staff vehicle. One of the officers is making amendments to the map whilst his comrades watch. Another officer appears to be checking some alterations to a previous map.

On the march is a column of *Gebirgs* infantry. In the heat of the day they have discarded their headgear and have attached it to their rucksack. They are all armed with the mauser bolt action rifle, which can be seen worn over their right shoulder.

Outside a quarter and a smiling *Gebirgstruppen* shows his comrades some flowers that he has carefully put inside a 7.5cm artillery shell, probably trying to make his shelter more homely. He wears the typical uniform associated to that of a *Gebirgsjäger*.

A *Gebirgs* soldier, guarding a heavy MG34 machine gun position on the corner of a busy town in Poland. The locals seem impervious to this piece of weaponry, which is mounted on a sustain fire mount. Each infantry battalion contained an MG Kompanie, which fielded eight MG34 heavy machine guns on the sustained fire-mount.

Inside a forest clearing and soldiers from the 6.SS-Gebirgs-Division pose for a group photograph with their mosquito nets temporarily pulled back over their headdress. With the vast amounts of lakes and stagnated pools of water in the forested regions where the division was fighting, mosquito nets plagued the daily routine of the German soldier.

SS truppen, belonging to the 6.SS-Gebirgs-Division, ferrying supplies across a river. Onboard are loaves of bread, which was a vital ingredient to the dwindling stocks of food supplied to the German forces on the Ostfront. An MG34, mounted on an anti-aircraft tripod, is being used against possible aerial attack, which was now a constant problem for the soldiers.

SS troops, from the 6.SS-Gebirgs-Division, pause during operations in the Karelia, where it fought until the Finnish armistice in September 1944. The division then marched on foot, nearly 1000-miles, through Finland and Norway. It arrived in Denmark in December and was transferred to the Palatinate in western Germany. It fought in the '*Nordwind*' offensive in January 1945, where it suffered heavy losses.

Soldiers from the *6.SS-Gebirgs*-Division appear to be on a boat, crossing one of the many lakes or rivers that crisscrossed the forested regions in Finland. In late August and early September 1944, the *6 SS.Gebirgs*-Division formed the rear guard for the three German corps withdrawing from Finland, in what was known as '*Operation Birch*'.

6.SS-Gebirgs truppen carry a wounded comrade on a stretcher to one of the hastily erected field dressing stations in the area. Losses to the division were high, especially during its withdrawal from Finland, as it fought in a vicious rear guard action in order to allow three German corps to retreat.

Three photographs, taken in sequence, showing an *SS-Rottenführer* from the 6.SS-Gebirgs-Division '*Nord*' being presented the Iron Cross 2nd Class by his commanding officer. In the first photograph, the soldier stands to attention as the officer approaches, they then shake hands, and the *Rottenführer* is presented with the cross, with the ribbon worn through the tunic's second button hole only.

Here, in this photograph, during the same decoration ceremony, an *SS-Schütze* is presented with an Iron Class 1st Class from his company commander who holds the rank of an *SS-Untersturmführer*. The Iron Cross 1st Class was worn centered over the right breast pocket.

Epilogue

By the spring of 1945, what was left of Hitler's mountain troops were carrying out a fighting withdrawal through Hungary and Austria, while on the receding Eastern Front those *Gebirgs* units still in action were ad hoc formations, fighting alongside *Hitlerjugend*, Volkssturm, *Wehrmacht* and *Waffen-SS* personnel. Even by this late stage of the war, the level of determination and courage shown by the Gebirgsjäger formations was quite exceptional, considering many soldiers were totally aware that there was no prospect of victory. However, in the closing days of the war, most mountain soldiers were determined to withdraw west and surrender to the Anglo-American forces rather than the Red Army. Few of them harboured any illusions as to the kind of treatment that they would receive from the Russians. It was for this reason that many of the remaining units decided to take their fate in the west.

Although by early May 1945, the *Gebirgsjäger* was all but destroyed, in the eyes of these once elite mountain men they marched into captivity and laid down their arms in the sound knowledge that no military formation in history had achieved more. They had battled across half Russia, they had shown their skill and endurance in all types of warfare, and gone on and fought bitter battles as they slowly withdrew westwards to the very gates of Berlin, and beyond.

Nobody could deny that these men, in their brief and extraordinary existence, had won a reputation for their skill and gallantry in combat. Throughout the war, each *Gebirgs* soldier had looked upon himself as an elite fighting machine. Even in defeat, as many dispirited troops shuffled off to the prisoner-of-war camps, scores of *Gebirgsjäger* soldiers retained a measure of composure and defiance for they knew they were Hitler's mountain troops.

Gebirgsjäger Formations

In addition to the Army's standard Jäger divisions, were the units of the Gebirgsjäger divisions, which were initially outside the standard divisional numbering system. These mountain troops had their own series of numbers and were as follows:

1st Gebirgs Division
2nd Gebirgs Division
3rd Gebirgs Division
4th Gebirgs Division
5th Gebirgs Division
6th Gebirgs Division
7th Gebirgs Division
8th Gebirgs Division
9th Gebirgs Division

(Gebirgs Korps of the Army)
XV Gebirgs Korps
XVIII Gebirgs Korps
XIX Gebirgs Korps
XXI Gebirgs Korps
XXII Gebirgs Korps
XXXVI Gebirgs Korps
XXXXIV Gebirgs Korps
LI Gebirgs Korps

1.Gebirgs-Division

Organization
Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 98
Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 99
Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 100
Gebirgs-Artillerie-Regiment 79
Gebirgs-Jäger-Bataillon 54
Gebirgs-Aufklärung-Abteilung 54

Gebirgs-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 44
Gebirgs-Pionier-Bataillon 54
Gebirgs-Nachrichten-Abteiliung 54
Gebirgs-Sanitäts-Abteilung 54
Gebirgs-Feldersatz-Bataillon 54
Gebirgs-Träger-Bataillon 54

Campaigns

Poland 1939
Western Campaign 1940
Balkan Campaign 1941
Eastern Front 1941-1943
Balkan/Italian Fronts 1943-1945

2 Gebirgsjager Division

Organization
1,3 Abteilung, Gebirgsjäger Regiment 136
1,2,3 Abteilung, Gebirgsjäger Regiment 137
2 Abteilung, Gebirgsjäger Regiment 140
2,3 Abteilung, Gebirgs Artillerie Regiment 111
1 Abteilung, Gebirgs Artillerie Regiment 113
11.Reconnaissance Abteilung
47.Panzerabwehr Abteilung
82.Gebirgs Pionier Abteilung
67. Nachrichten Abteilung
67. Divisional support units

Campaigns

Poland 1939
Yugoslavia 1941
Russia 1943
Balkans 1944
Hungary 1945

3.Gebirgsjäger-Division

Organization
Gebirgsjäger Regiment 138
Gebirgsjäger Regiment 139
Gebirgs-Artillerie-Regiment 112
Aufklärungs-Abteilung 12
Panzerabwehr-Abteilung 48
Gebirgs-Pionier-Bataillon 83
Gebirgsjäger-Feldersatz-Bataillon 68
Gebirgs-Divisions-Nachschubtruppen 68
Gebirgs-Divisions-Nachrichten-Abteilung 68
Radfahr-Abteilung 68
Aufklärungs-Abteilung 83

Campaigns
Poland 1939
Norway 1940
Finland 1941
Russia (Northern) 1942
Balkans 1944
Hungary 1945

4. Gebirgsjäger-Division

Organization
1,2,3 Abteilung, Gebirgsjager-Regiment 13
1,2,3 Abteilung, Gebirgsjager-Regiment 91
1,2,3,4 Abteilung, Gebirgs-Artillerie-Regiment 94
94. Panzerjäger-Company
94.Gebirgs -Pioneer-Company
94.Reconnaissance-Abteilung
94. Nachrichten-Abteilung
94.Divisional support units

Campaigns
Yugoslavia 1941
Russia 1941 – 1944
Hungary 1945

5.Gebirgsjäger-Division

Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 85
Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 100
Gebirgsjäger-Artillerie-Regiment 95
Gebirgs-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 95
Gebirgs-Aufklarüng-Abteilung 95
Gebirgs-Pionier-Abteilung 95
Gebirgs-Nachrichten-Abteilung 95
Gebirgs-Sanitäts-Abteulung 95
Gebirgs-Feldersatz-Bataillon 95

Campaigns

Greece, Crete 1941
Occupation of Crete 1941–1942
Eastern Front 1942–1943
Italian Front 1943–1944
Western Front 1944–1945

6.Gebirgsjäger-Division

Organization

Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 141
Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 143
Gebirgs-Artillerie-Regiment 118
Divisionseinheiten 91

Campaigns

Occupation Duty France, Poland, Yugoslavia and Greece
Norway and Finland 1941 - 1944

7.Gebirgsjäger-Division

Organization

Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 206
Gebirgs-Artillerie-Regiment 82
Divisionseinheiten 99

Campaigns

Finland 1941 – 1944
Norway 1944

8.Gebirgsjäger-Division

Organization

Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 296
Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 297
Gebirgs-Artillerie-Regiment 1057
Divisionseinheiten 1057

Campaigns

Italy 1945

9.Gebirgsjäger-Division

Organization

No data available

Campaigns

Austria 1945

188.Gebirgsjäger-Division

Organization

Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 901
Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 902
Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 903
Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 904
Gebirgs-Artillerie-Regiment 1088
Divisionseinheiten 1088

Campaigns

Balkans 1944
Yugoslavia 1944 – 1945

Gebirgsjäger-Korps

Organization

No data available

Campaigns

A number of Gebirgs-Korps commands were formed through the war on a number of fronts. Much of them were used to control mountain and other light units and anti-partisan operations.

Gebirgsjäger Uniforms

The Gebirgsjäger wore the regular army service uniform Model 1936 (M1936), which was specifically issued for battlefield conditions. This service uniform, which was almost identical to the Wehrmacht, was field-grey in colour and manufactured from wool/rayon mixed material. It had four box-pleated pockets, with a single metal finish button sewn to each of the four three pocket flaps. There were also five metal buttons sewn down the front of the tunic. The collar of the tunic was faced with dark blue-green material and sewn into this was the German Army collar-patch indicating NCOs and other ranks. The shoulder straps, made from dark blue-green material, was sewn into the shoulders of the tunic at the arm end and positioned at the other with a single metal button. This allowed easy access to unpin the shoulder strap in order for the soldier to remove and replace it, pending of course on the wearer's rank as well as his branch of service. The shoulder strap could also be used to hold the soldiers military equipment in place on the shoulders.

The ends of the sleeves of the tunic were not cuff turned and were specially cut in order that the sleeve ends could be wrapped tighter around the soldier's wrist and this allowed it to be buttoned into position.

Stitched on the right of the tunic, above the breast pocket, was the national emblem of Germany. This silver emblem consisted of an eagle with outstretched wings, clutching in its claws a wreath containing a swastika. One item of the tunic that distinguished itself from the Army tunic was the edelweiss arm badge, which was sewn on the right upper sleeve. This badge design was again repeated on the headdress. Another item of cloth normally sewn onto the uniform was the German Army rank chevron and occasionally the specialist insignia, trade and specialist badge. These items were sewn directly onto the left sleeve of the field service uniform without any backing cloth. All types of arm rank chevrons and specialist badges were worn on the upper left arm of the uniform tunic, the service and field service tunics as well as the greatcoats.

Worn around the tunic waist was the army service brown leather belt with silver metal or aluminium buckle. When the soldier had his personal equipment, the wearer's leather support straps, ammunition pouches, and other important field equipment, needed to sustain him on the battlefield, were attached to the main tunic belt.

Apart from the tunic, the other item of clothing worn to accompany the service uniform was the trousers. These were normally field-grey in colour and were high waisted with a top button. The trousers had four fly buttons, two of which were stitched at a slanted angle and designed either with pocket flaps or no flaps at all, depending on the manufacturer. They were worn with a single button sewn into each pocket opening or pocket flap. Stitched on the right side of the trouser front was a 'fob pocket', and positioned just above this was a metal ring designed for the pocket watch chain.

The trousers worn were specially designed for the wearer with mountain and ski boots, where they were able to move more freely whilst undertaking specialist activities like mountaineering and skiing. The trousers were stone grey in colour, but were to be later replaced with field grey due to the demand for standardisation of the war economy. The boots could be tucked into the standard issue marching boots or slightly tapered at the ends and worn bound round with puttees.

The footwear for the service uniform was usually worn with the short lace-up ankle boots.

As for headgear worn by the mountain troops, they wore the standard army issue M1935 steel helmet, and the general service field cap known as the mountain cap or *Bergmütze*. The mountain cap was worn by all ranks of mountain units, ski units and *Jäger* personnel.

The cap was field grey in colour and positioned on the front was the German national emblem, the cockade, and two buttons. Sewn on the left side was a metal edelweiss badge. During snow conditions, this mountain cap had a special white wool knitted cover, which could easily be pulled over the cap.

Gebirgsjäger Winter Uniforms

By the time the first winter period had been endured, there were a number of winter camouflage uniforms hastily put into service. The quality of them varied, but generally they were properly manufactured. In an attempt to restore morale in the troops following the first Russian winter, the German High Command produced a handbook on winter warfare and issued it to the troops. Whole chapters dealt with building various primitive shelters, like igloos and various other constructions, whilst other parts of the book was on the subject of suitable winter clothing for the Russian winter. It admitted that winter garments, particular those of late 1941, had not reached the front until the worst of the weather had passed, but went on to reassure the reader that there would be adequate winter clothing for future operations, if victory was not attained by then. As a result of the winter handbook, it hoped to reassure the soldier that he would not freeze to death in the snow, like so many of his comrades had in late 1941. They hoped by manu-

facturing massive quantities of winter camouflage clothing, the troops would not only remain warm, but would be well concealed in the snow against the growing might of the Red Army. During the summer of 1942, manufacturers set an unprecedented goal to produce hundreds of thousands of winter camouflage uniforms. If the German Army were compelled to fight again in the winter, they would be ready to deal with the harsh elements, which would, in turn, increase the survivability of the soldier in sub zero temperatures.

In 1942, a new winter garment was designed, tested and then manufactured. The piece of winter clothing was a special German Army snow camouflage uniform, very similar to that worn by the Red Army. As a uniform, it was not only especially designed to keep out the harsh winter weather and keep the wearer warm, but it provided ample camouflage in the snow. German troops that wore this uniform, during the winter of 1942, tended to wear it for very long periods, both during the day and night. Due to this reason, the white side of the jacket and trousers tended to become soiled in dirt, thus defeating the whole idea of the white camouflage. Soldiers did attempt to try and clean these items of clothing but soon found that the thick blanket lining did not clean well, or took too long to dry out. For this reason, German troops wearing the reversible, continued to wear the white camouflage garments already mentioned, for these cotton covers, capes or suits could easily be washed and cleaned.

For the second winter of 1942, a German Army reversible winter uniform was manufactured and supplied to the front lines. When the troops were issued with these garments, in October and November 1942, they found the clothing extremely warm and comfortable. The uniform also provided the wearer with greater freedom of movement, especially with personal equipment. This uniform not only helped combat the severity of the cold, but helped prevent overheating during physical exertion.

The reversible clothing itself consisted of a heavy reversible double-breasted over jacket that was designed for extra frontal warmth. It had double buttoned overlaps to the flaps of the jacket to the front, which when closed were wind resistant. The bottom edge of the jacket had drawstrings attached, and the ends of the cuffs were also adjustable as well. The trousers worn were thick, as was the jacket, and was completely reversible. They were shorter in length to normal standard issue uniformed trousers but could be either worn over the top of the leather marching boots or tucked inside. The ends of the trousers were gathered in by drawstrings and tied in around the boots.

The winter reversible was normally mouse-grey on one side and winter white on the other. The soldiers wore the reversible garment pending on the terrain. If the area was snow covered, the wearer wore the uniform on the winter white side out, and during operations where there was no snow, it was worn mouse-

grey side out. However, there were other variations of the reversible, which included the green splinter pattern and the tan water pattern.

The reversible uniform was designed large enough to be worn over the service uniform, including personal equipment. However, troops did favour wearing most of their equipment over the winter jacket.

For the next four years of the war, the *Gebirgsjäger* was seen wearing these popular winter camouflage garments. By the early winter of 1943, the winter reversible had become one of the most popular items of winter clothing worn by the troops. Soldier survivability had actually increased, in spite of the major military setbacks. In the winter of 1941, more than half the cases of casualties were caused by the extreme sub zero temperatures like frostbite. By the end of 1942, this figure had reduced considerably. A year later, in the winter of 1943, it was less than a quarter of the casualties.

Gebirgsjäger Weapons

3.7cm PaK35/36 anti-tank gun
5cm PaK38 anti-tank gun
5cm leGrW36 light mortar
8cm mGrW34 medium mortar
8cm kzGrW42 short mortar
12cm sGrW42 heavy mortar
7.5cm IG18 light infantry gun
15cm sIG33 heavy infantry gun
7.5cm GebK15 mountain cannon
7.5cm GebG36 mountain gun
10.5cm GebH40 mountain howitzer
10.5cm leFh18 light field howitzer
15cm sFH18 heavy field howitzer
2cm FlaK30, FlaK38, and GebFlaK38 anti-aircraft guns

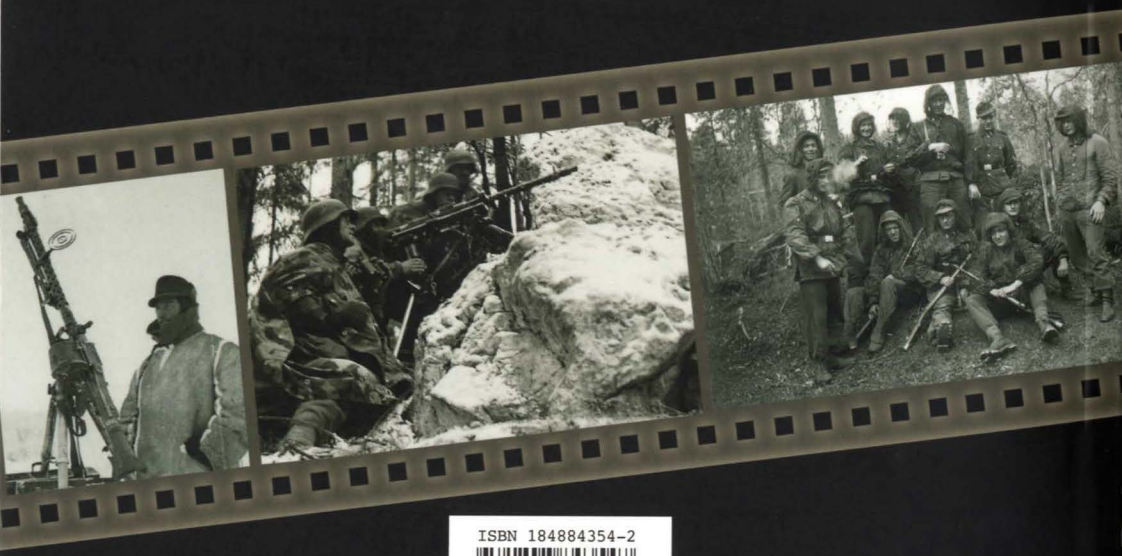
Conventional personal infantry weapons

7.92mm Kar98K carbine (bolt action rifle)
7.92mm Gew33/40 rifle
7.92mm Gew33(t) rifle
7.92mm Gew43 rifle
7.92mm MG34 machine gun
7.92mm MG42 machine gun
7.92mm MP43 assault rifle
7.9mm MP44 (Stg44) assault rifle
9mm MP38 pistol (Luger)
9mm P08 pistol (Walther)
Panzerfaust 30, 60 and 100 anti-tank rocket launchers
8.8cm RPzB43
8.8cm RPzB 54 anti-tank rocket launchers

Hitler's Mountain Troops (*Gebirgsjager*) were trained to ski, climb, survive appalling conditions and endure long marches. As such they were feared by opponents as crack shock troops. Yet many of the campaigns in which the elite *Gebirgsjager* fought were not in the specialist role for which they had been trained but on more level ground employed as assault infantry in conventional battle.

The *Gebirgsjager* fought with distinction in virtually all the theatres of the Second World War, notably on the Eastern Front, where operations took them into the Caucasus. They wore the distinctive *Edelweiss* badge with justifiable pride. With its superb photographs supported by informative text and captions, this latest book in the *Images of War* Series shows the *Gebirgsjager* in training and action from Poland, Norway and France, through Yugoslavia, the Eastern Front and to the closing stages of the War.

Ian Baxter has produced a fine selection of highly illustrated books in the *Images of War* Series mainly covering Axis Forces in WW2. He is a dedicated collector of rare images and an expert in his field.



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